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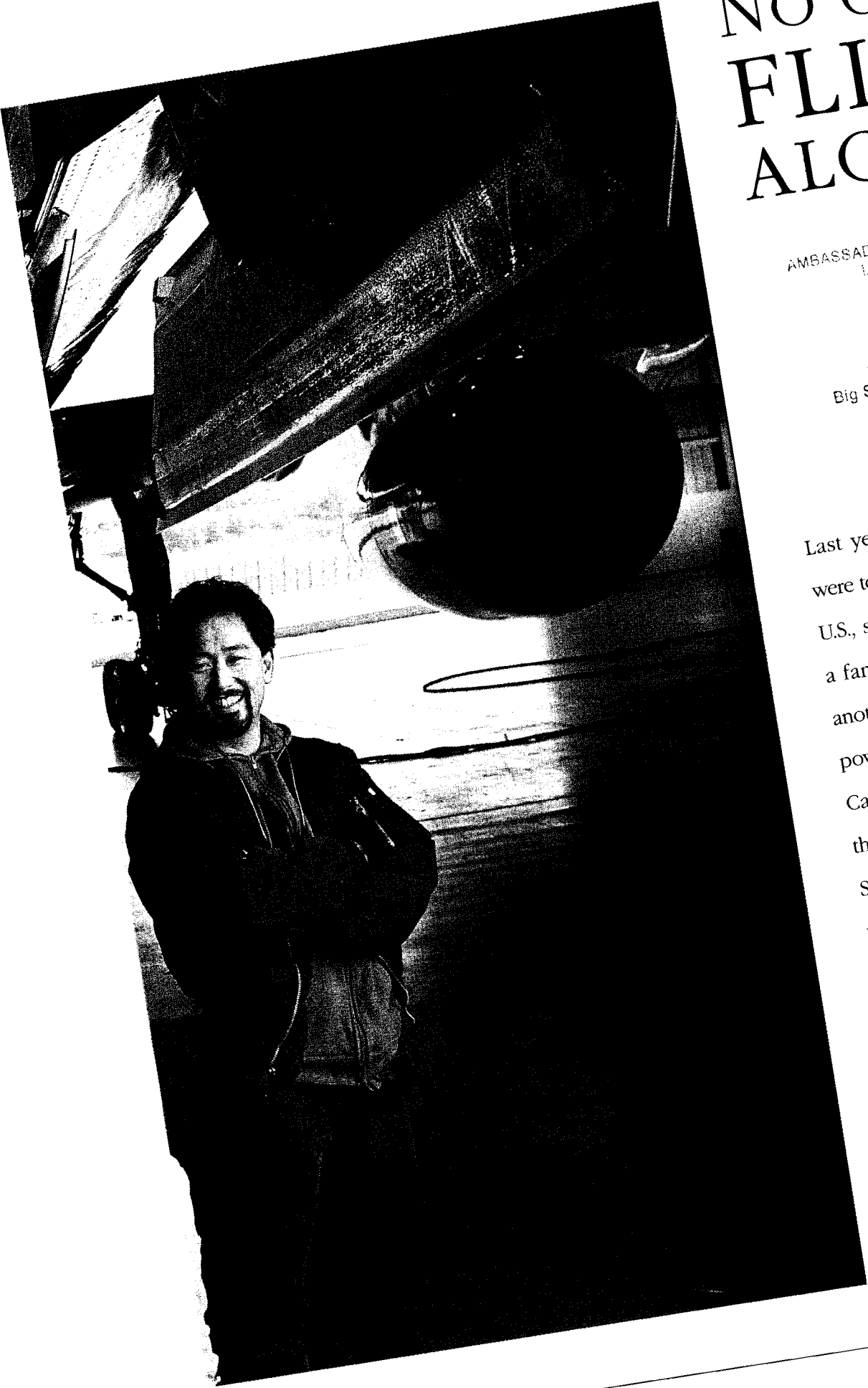
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FROM WASHINGTON

Workfare wimp-out

Call me naïve, but I almost believed House Republicans when they pledged in their "contract" to reform welfare through "a tough two-years-and-out provision with work requirements." Making welfare recipients work, after all, is wildly popular (if it weren't, it wouldn't be in the contract). Newt Gingrich's political action committee once even listed "workfare" as one of the "Optimistic Positive Governing Words" it recommended to fellow revolutionaries. I figured Gingrich himself had talked so much about the need for a "mandatory requirement of work for everybody" that he might actually mean it, or at least would be too embarrassed to admit he didn't mean it. I underestimated him.

House Republicans unveiled their welfare reform plan on February 10. Most welfare-watchers expected the new bill to dilute somewhat the contract's work provisions. But few expected the abject abandonment of any credible attempt to require work. Yet that's more or less what Representative Clay Shaw, the lead Republican on welfare reform, announced. The new GOP bill, which has cleared Shaw's subcommittee, is not only weaker on the work issue than President Clinton's welfare proposal, it is in some respects weaker than the current welfare law Republicans deride.

It's certainly a long way from the Contract with America. The contract would have required work by those who had received welfare "for at least twenty-four months." Work meant "an average of not fewer than thirty-five hours per week." No funny business. By 2003, 50 percent of the welfare caseload (which currently consists of more than 5 million households) would be working.

The rationale behind these provisions was obvious: if potential welfare recipients (mainly young women) knew they were really going to have to work after two years, they might think twice before doing the things (mainly becoming single mothers) that put them on welfare in the first place. But Republican govern-

nors, it turns out, don't like work requirements much—in part because putting a welfare mother to work costs money (an extra \$6,000, over and above the cost of benefits, to pay for supervisors and day care, according to the Congressional Budget Office).

Why raise state taxes to make welfare recipients perform community-service work—annoying public employee unions in the process—when you can do what Michigan's Republican Governor John Engler does: cycle recipients through inexpensive education and "job search" programs while claiming to be a great reformer? Engler's inflated reputation was recently punctured by journalist David Whitman (see "Compleat Engler," TNR February 6). But that didn't stop him from leading the charge to gut the contract's work requirements when House Republicans decided, after the election, to negotiate with GOP governors over replacing the federal welfare program with a "block grant" to the states.

Engler's mission was successful. Look first at the numbers. The bill unveiled by Shaw requires that, in 1996, states place 2 percent of the welfare caseload "in work activities." The requirement rises to 20 percent—not the contract's 50 percent—by 2003. In meeting this requirement, governors could count the 6 percent of recipients who already work at least part-time. Another 5 percent are already required to work by a 1988 reform law now in effect (which the Republican bill would repeal). That makes 11 percent already working. With a little creative bookkeeping—say, by counting all those who work, even for a few days, over the course of a year—most governors could meet the 20 percent "work activity" standard without doing anything they're not already doing.

But creative bookkeeping won't be necessary, because the Shaw bill lets the states decide what a "work activity" is. It needn't be actual work. Under the bill, a governor could declare, as Engler has, that checking a book out of a library counts as a "work activity." Leafing through the want ads might also qualify, or circulating a résumé or attending a "self-esteem" class.

Republicans criticized President Clinton's ill-fated two-years-and-work plan because it only would have required approximately 500,000 recipients, or about 10 percent of the caseload, to be in a work program by 2003. But at least in Clinton's plan those 500,000 people would really have to be working. (An additional 900,000 or so would be in education and training programs.) The House Republicans say they will put "at

least 1 million cash welfare recipients in work programs by 2003," but the "work" could be completely phony. Workfare, you might call it.

It is all the more likely to be fake because the Shaw bill provides no money to make it real. The Contract with America, in a fit of honesty, earmarked \$9.9 billion to pay for its work programs. The new bill contains no new funds. It does retain language that seems to require states to make recipients work—sorry, "engage in work activities"—after two years. But GOP aides admit this provision is "mostly rhetoric" not meant to be obeyed. There are no penalties for states that ignore it. (If it *were* obeyed, a lot more than 20 percent of the caseload would wind up "working.")

House Republicans don't even try very hard to pretend they haven't caved on the work issue. It was

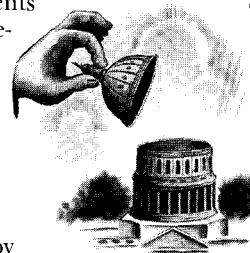
the price, they argue, of getting the governors to agree to a stingy "block grant," and to accept the contract's cutoff of aid to young unwed mothers. Priorities! Bizarrely, the Newtoids sacrificed the popular parts of the contract ("make 'em work") to save the unpopular parts ("cut 'em off"). It was too much

even for some conservatives. Robert Rector, the Heritage Foundation's welfare expert, called the Shaw work provisions a "major embarrassment." Jack Kemp issued a statement warning that Republicans were squandering welfare reform in the pursuit of a decentralized "funding mechanism."

Shaw now says he will try to shore up the work provisions—specifying what counts as a "work activity," for example. But it may be difficult to convince the governors to endorse a major tightening—after all, the chief virtue of Shaw's bill, for them, was that it let them weasel out of the contract's work requirements.

It also may be too late. The premise of the GOP's new state-based welfare bill is that the nation's governors are reformist tigers who need only to be unleashed by the bureaucrats in Washington. But the governors have now shown their hand, and it's obvious to all that they have no appetite for radical reform, especially reform based on work. Instead, they have with great effort turned the contract's ambitious plan into a bill that allows them to preserve the status quo. Even the controversial cutoff of young unwed mothers may be mainly an accounting trick. (States can simply pay the benefits out of their "own" funds.) The Republicans' welfare reform is looking less like a menace and more like a fraud.

MICKEY KAUS





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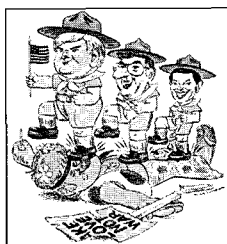
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FOUNDED 1914
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ISSUE 4,182

- 4 **MICKEY KAUS** TRB: WORKFARE WIMP-OUT How the GOP gutted its own reform plan.
- 6 **CORRESPONDENCE** Christie Whitman's rising star, more teenage girl gossip &c.
- 9 **THE EDITORS** WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS The isolationists vs. . . . the isolationists.
- 10 **NOTEBOOK** Differently abled Syrians, new Carter pieties, dangerous fish &c.
- 12 **HANNA ROSIN** WOOLLY PULPIT A feel-good church for the '90s.
- 14 **SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE** ESTONIA POSTCARD: TRUE GRIT The John Wayne of Tallinn.
- 15 **RUTH SHALIT** DARLIN' ARLEN The Pennsylvania senator's quixotic campaign.
- 16 **ERIC KONIGSBERG** SCIENCE MADE EASY A study in publishing-world trendiness.
- 20 **DOUGLAS W. PAYNE** WALL STREET BLUES The high-flying investors who secured the Mexican bailout were the ones who caused the trouble in the first place.
- 23 **FRED BARNES** REVENGE OF THE SQUARES They supported the Vietnam War, got married young and didn't smoke pot. Newt Gingrich and his team—the flip side of the 1960s counterculture—now want to reclaim society from the liberal elite.
- 30 **STANLEY KAUFFMANN** ON FILMS: ALTERED LIVES Czech mate: Jiří Weiss's memorable *Martha and I*.
- 31 **NICHOLAS LEMANN** HOPE AGAINST HOPE *On the Edge* by Elizabeth Drew and *Middle Class Dreams* by Stanley B. Greenberg
- 35 **JED PERL** ON ART: SOLITARY IN THE CITY OF ART Kitaj and Balthus, two nonconformist rebels against an age of abstraction.
- 38 **CHRISTOPHER BENFEY** WISE GUY *One Train* and *On the Great Atlantic Railway* by Kenneth Koch
- 40 **DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN** POEM *The Book of Matches*
- 42 **JAMEY GAMBRELL** KITSCH OF DEATH *The Total Art of Stalinism* by Boris Groys
- 46 **JEFFREY ROSEN** NEW YORK DIARIST: STORYTELLING

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CORRESPONDENCE

Jersey girl

To the editors:

After reading John Judis's "Hot Toddy," (February 13) I had a greater appreciation of Governor Christine Todd Whitman's history, of the evolution of her political ideas and of the competing social and political forces that advise her policy decisions. But Judis strayed far from insight and accuracy regarding his views of New Jersey cities, especially of Trenton. What led him to conclude that Trenton is a city where you can "sit in state offices and hear gunshots ring out from nearby crack houses"? And what "liberal Rutgers professor" claimed there aren't any black political leaders in New Jersey who haven't been indicted? Such a statement is malicious.

There is crime in Trenton just as there is in every community in America. There are political leaders, both black and white, in New Jersey, and in every other state, who have been prosecuted. However, there is no justification for Judis's outrageous exaggerations of these facts. This unwarranted hyperbole contributes

to a climate of misunderstanding and fear. It feeds the hysteria that keeps people away from cities.

DOUGLAS H. PALMER

Mayor

Trenton, New Jersey

To the editors:

"Hot Toddy" captured Governor Whitman's popularity in the state. The story, however, was misleading about the history of taxes in New Jersey.

The Supreme Court did not order an income tax implemented in 1974. Courts do not order legislatures to pass taxes. In 1976 the Supreme Court threatened to close the state's public schools unless a fair method of funding was found. That year Governor Brendan Byrne's administration put in place the state's first income tax. But despite the tax's unpopularity, Byrne was re-elected in 1977 with 58 percent of the vote. The income tax, put to referendum, passed by almost 2 to 1.

Tom Kean promised not to raise taxes in his narrow victory over Jim Florio in 1981. But he raised both sales and income taxes during his first term. Nonetheless, in his re-election campaign in 1985, Kean got more than 70 percent of the vote. And when, as governor, Florio put in place immense tax increases, he still lost re-election by only

25,000 votes against a candidate promising a large tax cut.

RICHARD C. LEONE

New York, New York

To the editors:

John Judis's conclusion that New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman holds "the same views on welfare as Ted Kennedy" is astonishing. As Judis observes, Whitman refused to endorse then-Governor Jim Florio's campaign proposal to "punish welfare mothers who wouldn't report their children's fathers." But the story does not end there.

Whitman inherited from Florio, and embraced, the nation's first child exclusion law. This law eliminates the state's standard AFDC grant increment for any child of a recipient-mother after she has been receiving assistance for more than ten months. The Whitman administration recently defended the law in federal court, insisting that it was an "opportunity" for poor families to change their behavior. One can hardly imagine Ted Kennedy, who opposes the law, characterizing a reduction in aid to children as opportunity enhancement.

KEVIN RYAN

South Amboy, New Jersey

Choice matter

To the editors:

Mickey Kaus is correct to point out that the child exclusion welfare reform proposals will coerce at least some women into having abortions they would otherwise not choose ("Life Rift," TRB, February 13). For that reason, pro-life organizations are opposing these proposals. We are dismayed to read, however, that Kaus, though pro-choice, does not see that the child exclusion is profoundly *anti-choice*.

As proponents of choice, we are not pro-abortion. Rather, we believe that the choice to have or not to have children is a purely personal one. The purpose of the child exclusion is to deny subsistence welfare benefits to women who exercise the right to choose childbearing while they're poor. The result is to punish children because of the circumstances of their birth and to create a means test for reproductive freedom.

DEBORAH LEWIS

Legislative Counsel

American Civil Liberties Union

MARTHA DAVIS

Senior Staff Attorney

NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

Mickey Kaus speculates that cutting off government subsidies to women having children out of wedlock will discourage

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pregnancies or encourage abortions ("Life Rift," TRB, February 13). He reports that "surveys show that economics plays a big role in the decision to abort." The abortion rate dropped "more than 20 percent" when the Reagan-Bush braintrust withdrew government funding from abortions for impoverished women.

What he is actually saying is that there were 20 percent fewer abortions that we know of. Perhaps a few of those impoverished women were afraid or unable to think of another way out and had their babies. The rest of the unwanted pregnancies ended anyway, in spite of government condemnation.

PAULINE K. DESSLER
Highland Park, Illinois

All the rage

To the editors:

In "Rage, Rage," (February 13) John Weir describes David Feinberg's speech to an ACT UP meeting as "egotistical." Weir criticizes Feinberg for caring more about his own life than the lives of others with AIDS. Weir wants us to be outraged that Feinberg, in his final days, had the nerve to care about his own survival. It's funny that Weir chooses the word "egotistical" to describe Feinberg. That term might better be applied to Weir's complaint that Feinberg didn't take care of his needs while dying.

Feinberg's death affected more people than Feinberg, as Weir notes. However, I would suggest that it affected Feinberg somewhat more. Weir tells us that Feinberg said, "This is about me." Nothing matters now except saving me." Ironically, Feinberg's statement is a perfect summary of John Weir's article.

JOHN WHITESIDE
Boston, Massachusetts

To the editors:

I felt like David Feinberg deserved some praise after John Weir's "Rage, Rage." Having been raised on a farm in the Midwest, I am far removed from Feinberg's gay and Jewish New York world. When I came out, however, his writing provided me with a healthy dose of humor. His character, B.J. Rosenthal, and his physical deterioration and fear caused by AIDS, gave me an ironic introduction into a gay world living in the shadow of a plague.

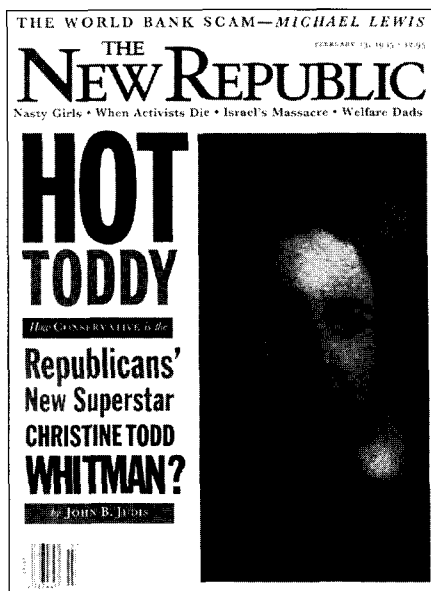
Although I have not had to grapple with AIDS or its futility, I can sympathize with the sense of anger, self-defeating as it may be, of being despised by many but also the victim of a disease that brands you and snuffs out your life. I'll remember his wit, not his rage.

MARK GRAHAM
Monmouth, Illinois

To the editors:

As editor of David B. Feinberg's three books, I cannot remain silent. People die horrible deaths from AIDS, and some behave horribly in the process. As Feinberg's "closest friend for the past five years," John Weir surely must have noticed that Feinberg was a difficult man even while healthy. I am sorry Weir bore the brunt of Feinberg's anger in his last months. But to have expected the death of a saint, rather than that of an imperfect human being, and not to have known that sometimes a person's worst characteristics are magnified at the end are indicative of Weir's critical faculties.

ED IWANICKI
New York, New York



Left bank

To the editors:

Michael Lewis ("Where Credit Is Due," February 13) falls prey to the same kind of misconceptions that he deplores in his wry and perceptive critique of *Faith and Credit*.

He argues that World Bank finances are "as far removed from the market as they can be" just because its bonds are backed by guarantees of its shareholders. But he doesn't mention that the bank has never had to call on such guarantees, thanks to an unsurpassed record of prudent financial management.

Lewis writes that the bank "was conceived in a spirit of hostility to private enterprise" and suggests that, until recently, it had somehow been a force against the private sector. The bank's article of agreement stresses that it should lend when private capital is not reasonably available. There is no evidence that the bank crowded out private finance, or that infrastructure investments would have attracted private money if the bank

had not been there. Investments in roads, ports, power plants and other projects created an improved environment for private enterprise and contributed to advances in living standards (which Lewis acknowledges). Historically, the bank has offered pro-market advice to governments. The governments, however, have sovereign objectives within whatever economic philosophy they have chosen to pursue. Fortunately, there is now a global consensus behind the marketplace.

BARBER B. CONABLE
Former World Bank president
Alexander, New York

Affirmative action figures

To the editors:

Jeffrey Rosen gives a long-overdue exposition of the obvious ("Dancing Days," February 13). With a great deal of common sense, he suggests something that needs repeating until we get it right: federal contract set-asides for classes defined by administrative law are indefensible.

But Rosen pulls up short of the mark. It should be made obvious that all state-sponsored affirmative actions to distribute economic justice as civil rights are indefensible. It is impossible to guarantee scarce goods to some without denying others.

Making this practice into public policy licenses social disorder, not social justice. Witnessing the plight of American black men after thirty years of government advocacy, this effort serves least those in whose name it is made.

RAY SCANNELL
Evergreen Park, Illinois

Whispery script

To the editors:

I take no stand on the network status of "My So-Called Life," ("Nasty Girls," Washington Diarist, February 13). But I feel compelled, as one of many who shared in Ruth Shalit's girlhood, to note that our adolescent rants and gushes did by no means go unanswered.

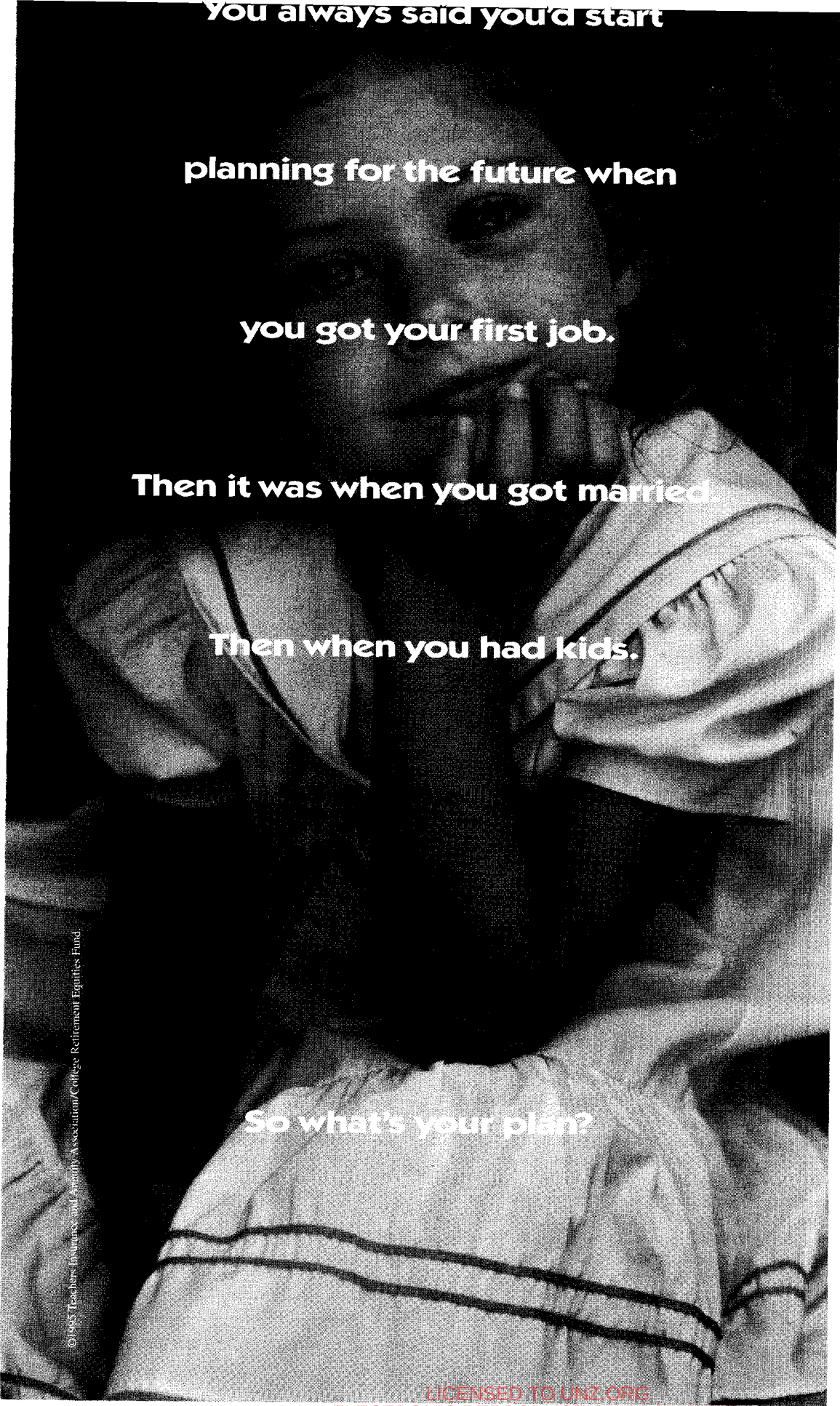
I quote the inscription on the inside cover of a then-alarmingly hip suburban girls' novel given to me as I departed for a high school year abroad in 1986 (you must imagine it in dear, whispery script):

Heather—you can read this on the plane! I'm going to miss you so much, I don't even want to think about it! Don't change in Norway—you are the greatest! R/T/F/A/A/F (really true friends always and forever)

R/T/F/A/A/F

I daresay we were bested for all time by that C/A (closing acronym).

H. HOLDEN BROOKS
St. Johnsbury, Vermont



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MARCH 13, 1995

WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS

A great debate on foreign policy is taking place in Washington, but it is not the debate that Washington thinks is taking place.

The occasion is the passage by the House of the National Security Revitalization Act, which proposes to make into law the provisions of the Contract with America that treat America's duties beyond America's borders, with the objective of diminishing or denying those duties. "We don't want to be the patsy of the world anymore," Representative Dana Rohrabacher thoughtfully observed about the role that the United States has played in the world for the past half-century. "The nation has gone too far in the direction of globalism," Representative Dick Armey warned, "and we intend to correct that."

The correction takes the form of congressional interference in the president's ability to place the troops of the United States under the command of the United Nations. For the Republicans, American participation in U.N. peacekeeping forces embodies the globalism that they despise. Their bill requires the administration to charge the United Nations for the costs of American support of its peacekeeping missions. Last year such costs (for the transportation of troops and equipment, for example) came to \$1.7 billion. The National Security Revitalization Act, in short, is designed to make peacekeeping impossible by bankrupting it. The president and the secretary of state and the secretary of defense are all outraged, and are lobbying hard and threatening a veto. They believe that they are fighting the good fight, beating back the Republican tradition of isolationism in the name of the Democratic tradition of internationalism.

They are half right. The Republicans (look who suddenly insist on micromanaging foreign policy from the Hill!) are indeed interested in an American withdrawal from the world. And there have been conflicts in the world in which U.N. peacekeeping missions have played

positive roles: in Mozambique, in Guatemala, in Angola, in Macedonia. And yet the administration's enthusiasm for the peacekeepers from Turtle Bay is not altogether supportable. In those conflicts of the post-cold war world that are most representative of the post-cold war world—in Bosnia, in Rwanda, in Somalia, in Chechnya—the U.N. played a negative role or no role at all. In Bosnia especially, peacemaking has looked more and more like a kind of passive warmaking, and the reputation of the United Nations has forever been tarnished by it.

The falsity of the administration's opposition to the Republican bill does not end there. For Clinton agrees with Gingrich that the United Nations is the perfect symbol and the perfect instrument of globalism. The foreign policy of the Clinton administration has been largely a long, fitful, callow and occasionally dishonest subordination of the authority of the United States to the authority of the United Nations. It has called this multilateralism, when in truth it is a usurpation of American power—and this at a time when American power is just about all the power that is left to restrain, by its use or by the sincere threat of its use, the tribalisms and the authoritarianisms that are wreaking havoc in the world, and in some places wreaking genocide. For this administration, it is a matter of principle for America not to lead.

So *this* is the debate that is taking place: the Republicans want the United States out of the United Nations because they do not want to project American power abroad, and the Democrats want the United States in the United Nations because they do not want to project American power abroad. In Washington, in 1995, there are no internationalists. The Republican assault on internationalism would be mischievous anytime. But turn inward, while Clinton is president? They really must be mad. •



NOTEBOOK

SIC TRANSIT: During the Bob Hope Golf Classic, Bill Clinton scored 100, Gerald Ford hit an onlooker and George Bush struck two, wounding one with a cut on the nose that required ten stitches.... Honolulu Hula Bowl promoters received \$100,000 and complaints about insensitivity to women after selling title sponsorship rights to the Hooters' restaurant chain.... After the lawyer for Howard "Wing Ding" Jones argued that, despite his status as a convicted drug dealer, he would not jump bail, the judge raised his bail from \$1,000 to \$150,000, at which point Jones fled the Pennsylvania courtroom.... Maryland lawmakers introduced a bill that would require punishing juvenile thieves and vandals with a cane beating.... William Mitchell of Dallas said, "This thing's gone ballistic in seventy-two hours" in reference to the overwhelming popular interest in Dead Serious

Inc., a Texas organization that offers members \$5,000 for legally killing a criminal who attacks them or their property.... Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi published a book of short stories and essays, *The Village, The Village, The Earth, The Earth and the Suicide of the Astronaut*.... Jimmy Carter's horoscope said, "Individuals high on intelligence scale will dub you mystery person."

THE SYRIANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT: Recently, the State Department sent to Congress its human rights report, its annual who's who of tyrants, terrorists and oppressors. This year's report has been praised for not whitewashing abuses by U.S. allies, from South Korea to Russia to Mexico, as previous reports had. But in their meticulous cataloging of transgressions, the human rights wonks in Foggy Bottom may have failed to see the forest for the trees. According to *The Washington Post*, the report takes Syria to task because, in that par-

ticular despotism, "there are no laws mandating access to public buildings for the disabled." Of course, they don't have government-funded health care for torture victims, either.

PARTY LOYALTY: With scads of potential Republican candidates declining of late to run for president in 1996—Dick Cheney, Jack Kemp, Dan Quayle and (sniff) Newt Gingrich—the field is now looking pretty sparse. One much talked-about candidate who has so far remained apart from the fray is California Governor Pete Wilson, one of the few leading Republicans who

might be able successfully to play to the right during the primaries, then turn around and play to the center for the general election. But Wilson has a small problem: should he become president, he will abdicate his gubernatorial seat to his lieutenant governor—Democrat Gray Davis. (California elects its governor and lieutenant governor separately, not as a ticket.) But, in keeping with the state's reputation for

inventiveness—not to say loopiness—Wilson's party-mates may have found a way out. Assemblywoman Paula Boland has introduced a bill that could abolish the office of lieutenant governor altogether, as of January 1, 1997. Next in the line of succession would be the state's attorney general, currently a Republican. The ringer is that the abolition of the office wouldn't be voted upon until the fall of 1996. So it looks as though Wilson will just have to take his chances.

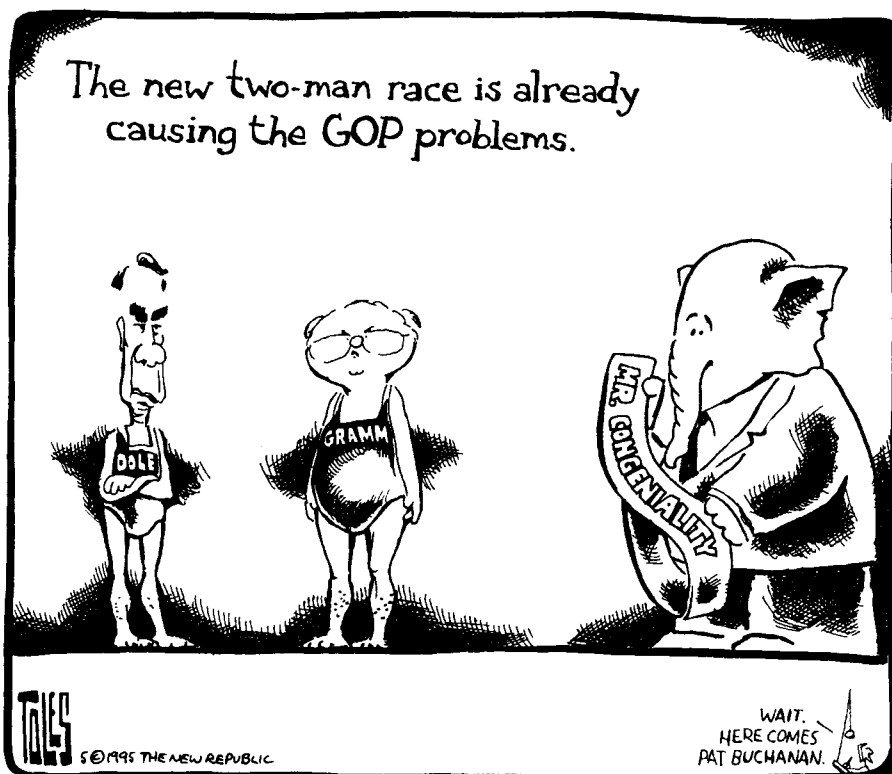
NOW THAT'S BORING!:

Czech Agriculture The Same, Only Different

—*Delaware County Times*, February 10

(Thanks to Jeffrey D. Cook, Oneonta, New York)

GEEZ, IT'S GETTING TO BE LIKE SHOOTING FISH IN A BARREL: Remember when, as a kid, you



used to pray for your home team to win the big game? Jimmy Carter, it turns out, has a similarly sophisticated view of religion. Initially, it was reported that Carter prayed for Newt Gingrich to lose in his last election campaign. Now the Carter Center of Atlanta—which is becoming less and less a world peacemaking enterprise and more and more a gaffe-mender and P.R. machine for the former president—has issued a correction. The center says that Carter prayed “that people *like* Newt Gingrich would be defeated and Democrats would win the elections in a proper way.” At least Carter has provided another argument against prayer in school: it doesn’t work.

DERAILED: On February 4, Representative Vernon Ehlers of Michigan became the latest House Republican plucked from obscurity by the grace of Newt. For his unyielding defense of the line-item veto, Ehlers was rewarded with the perk of delivering the response to Clinton’s radio address. “Let’s face it,” Ehlers quipped about his pork-prone colleagues. “Sometimes we in Congress can’t help ourselves.” Three days later, at a hearing on the elimination of Amtrak routes, Ehlers paid a visit. “I’m very upset,” he grieved. “Grand Rapids, Michigan, has been completely eliminated. Now that airline prices are going up and buses are expensive, how will the people of Grand Rapids travel?”

PPOINTING OUT THE OBVIOUS:

Relaxation prescribed for tension headaches

—*Rocky Mountain News*, February 16
(Thanks to Rob Bogin, Denver, Colorado.)

How we feel about ourselves is the core of self-esteem, says author Louise Hart

—Boulder, Colorado, *Sunday Camera*, February 5
(Thanks to David Goldberg, Boulder, Colorado.)

PPOINTING OUT THE OMINOUS:

Fish lurk in streams

—Rochester, New York, *Democrat & Chronicle*, January 29
(Thanks to Robert H. Goldstein, Henrietta, New York.)

UNPROVOKED: In the past six months, Palestinian terrorists have kidnapped and executed Israeli Corporal Nachson Waxman, blown up a passenger bus in Tel Aviv, killing at least twenty-one, and bombed a bus depot, killing at least nineteen. All of this has imposed challenges for the

peace process. So what do columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak see as the greatest threat to Middle East peace? A comment by Newt Gingrich to the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* that, as Evans and Novak put it in a February 2 column, “Israel has a right to put its capital where it wants and that’s where the U.S. Embassy belongs.” Talk of the U.S. someday moving its embassy to Jerusalem is nothing

new, and such a move, as the columnists know full well, is not about to derail the peace process singlehandedly. They go on to hint at a conspiracy run by Representatives Benjamin Gilman and Charles Schumer of New York to move the capital. Which sounds like something more nefarious than just anti-Israel political sentiment.

MUST HAVE BEEN SOME PARTY:

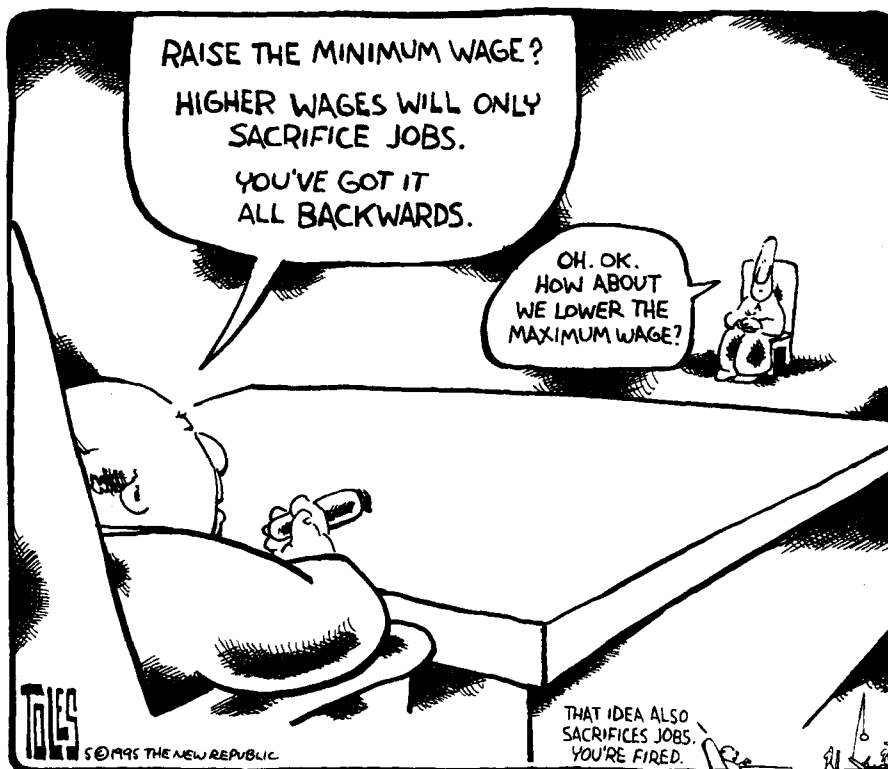
Party brawl spurs gunfire; four injured

● At least four people were hurt in Greensboro early Sunday after a party ended in a shootout.

Party brawl on nominee intensifies

● The Clinton administration vows to fight for Henry Foster’s nomination as surgeon general.

—*Greensboro News & Record*, February 13
(Thanks to Andrew Brod, Greensboro, North Carolina.)



God, without the guilt.

WOOLLY PULPIT

By Hanna Rosin

The only pain Pastor Charles Schmidt can't ease is the traffic, which snarls just after Hell Road. On a subarctic winter morning in suburban Maryland, the Volvos and Nissans inch down New Hampshire Avenue, past a Buddhist temple, a Muslim center and eight other sanctuaries, to meet the pastor at Immanuel's Church. Rain, sleet or snow, it's worth the pilgrimage, for Immanuel's is not like other churches. It's a Seeker church.

"People think of the church as a draconian thing of the past, with big towers and iron gates and frocked people who do weird things and speak a language no one understands," the pastor explains. "We get the message out that we are relevant." As relevant as, say, your local mall. "The shopping center makes you feel comfortable," clarifies Assistant Pastor Frank Bouts. "We want our church to be equally as customer-service oriented, or equally as sensitive to the needs of all the seekers, all the first-time visitors who come here."

Indeed, it is cozy. Come inside from the cold into what looks like an airy new barn, held up by wood beams with corn husks framing the sanctuary, no messy stigmata to ward you off. Instead, Jesus is transmuted into a gentle lamb, beaming from the sun-speckled stained glass. One plain wooden cross stands behind the pulpit, draped in a white cloth with the faintest smudge of red. Pastor Charles, who looks uncannily like Liam Neeson, tests the mike clipped to his plain brown tie. He waits for the crowd of about 1,000 to settle, then rouses them for a hymn. A troupe of suburban wives dressed in flowing white robes stages a dance, waving purple, blue and yellow banners. Half the crowd erupts in claps, the other half sways its outstretched arms: "Hallelujah, what a Saviour/Hallelujah, what a Friend/He is with me till the end."

If you don't know the words, don't worry: in this user-friendly eden, a technician in the balcony projects the words onto an overhead screen. The singing continues smoothly, uninterrupted by the usual distractions of screaming babies and whining kids. They have all been parked at either the Little Lamb Nursery, Noah's Ark for Toddlers or the Family Life Center, where righteous clowns in neon wigs belt out Mother Goose hymns. Each child is tagged with a badge, a copy of which the parents will have to produce before their bundle is turned over.

Immanuel provides other conveniences, too. It operates as a twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week shop-

ping mecca for the soul. Its ministries include an Anger Workshop; an Inner and Outer beauty class; a support group for Christians who Struggle with Homosexuality; and a program called Jesus is the Weigh, with an accompanying Christian aerobics class.

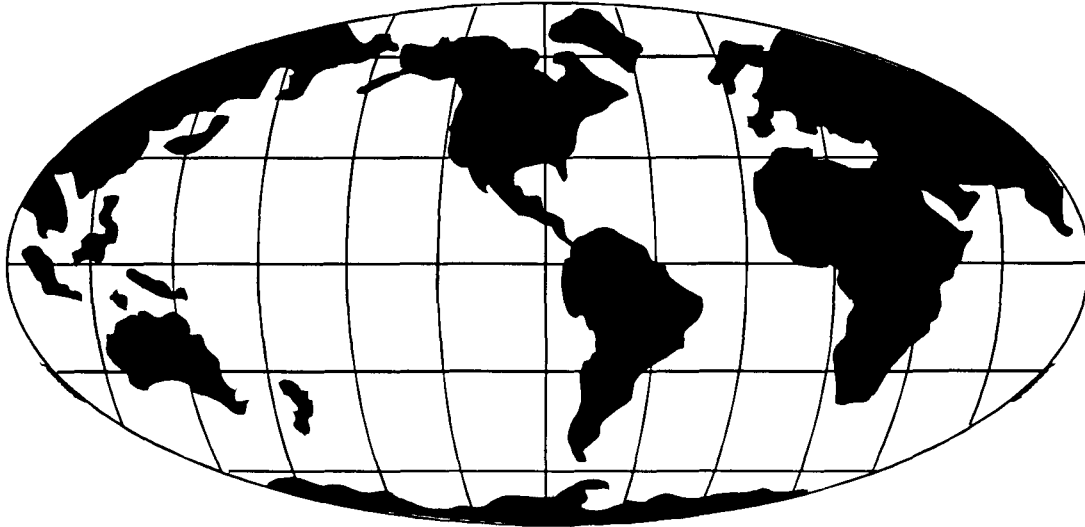
The standard theological criticism of the Seeker movement is that its pastors cater to the incessant needs of whining yuppies, making no demands in return, "obsequiously prostrating themselves before a sick, self-centered culture," as one critic put it. The ire is directed mainly at the Willow Creek Community Church, the original Seeker Church in South Barrington, Illinois. Willow Creek was founded in 1975, when 23-year-old Bill Hybels conducted a door-to-door survey to see why people don't attend church. He discovered that people found services boring and were annoyed at the regular fund-raising pitches. So he built a cross-free multimedia "worship house" that makes Immanuel's look like St. Peter's. It features unstained glass walls, a stage for an altar and video cameras peeking from every corner. Hybels's success can be measured by the 15,000 who turn out every week for Sunday services.

While no match for Willow Creek, Immanuel's boasts its own boom. It started as an informal meeting group of six in Pastor Charles's basement. Now the congregation is 1,800 strong and there are plans to build a three-acre, 5,000-seat state-of-the-art sanctuary by this spring. But the flock, less upscale than Willow Creek's, is a solidly middle-class crew from suburban Silver Spring. They've not come seeking justification for godless, prosperous lives but for a more prosaic reason: to rediscover what Norman Vincent Peale called "the power of daily living." So to understand their search, let us open our Good Books and rejoin the morning prayers.

Today's sermon deals with 1 Kings 19, Elijah at Mount Horeb. I knew that in advance, since my neighbor had scribbled notes in her Seeker Study Bible during Wednesday Bible class (Elijah = Prophet, Ahab = Evil). Elijah is hiding under a broom tree. The people of Israel have forsaken the covenant, slain all the other prophets and now have come to kill him. But these are not the worst of the prophet's problems. "Elijah," counsels the pastor, "is burnt out. He has become self-absorbed. But heaven understands," he assures. "He will fly again."

Pastor Charles directs us to a checklist labeled "The Symptoms of Depression": "Elijah felt hopeless, helpless, listless, vulnerable, without motivation or interest in living, anxious, frustrated, drained, depleted. Elijah repressed a deep anger within (depression is often anger turned inward)." The pastor slips imperceptibly into revelations of his own depression and salvation by his doting wife ("Thank God for Dotty!"). Soon he has those of us who have ever been depressed raising our hands and approaching the pulpit. I turn to my neighbor, smile and chant, "Elijah is cut from the same cloth as you and me." Pastor Charles is glowing. "Jesus," he booms, clutching the plastic pulpit until his knuckles turn white, "is your greatest antidepressant." •

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TRUE GRIT

By Simon Sebag Montefiore

"If I didn't have this job, I'd go down to Chechnya and fight for them myself," says General Alexander Einseln, 64, the grizzled 6'2" American commander of the Estonian Army. Einseln, known as the John Wayne of the Baltic, is one of the most flamboyant characters of the New World Order. We talk at the long table in his command headquarters in Tallinn, the quaint medieval capital of the tiny Baltic Republic of Estonia.

When Estonian President Lennart Meri appointed Einseln commander in May of 1993, he explained: "Napoleon is dead and Einseln was the next best thing." In stature, Einseln is more titanic than Napoleonic. Clad in his usual camouflage uniform, the giant, bespectacled general has gray hair and a handsome face that looks as if it were constructed of granite and leather. He speaks gruffly in an accent that combines his Estonian origins with his thirty years as a U.S. Army officer. The cut of his jib is that of someone from the age of Davy Crockett—or at least the lieutenant colonel played by Robert Duvall in *Apocalypse Now*. An austere, modest frontiersman, Einseln sees the world in terms of Good and Evil; as a boy in Estonia, his favorite book was *The Last of the Mohicans*. He wanted to go to the United States to fight for the Red Indians. He is now bringing the derring-do of the Wild West to the ex-Soviet Imperium.

"If I was a Russian general ordered to take Grozny," he continues, "I'd have resigned on the spot!" Estonians observe Chechen tactics with a view, one day, to resisting a Russian invasion of their own country. But only the general dares to say so out loud, though he knows there is a thin line between warning the Russian bear and baiting it. "We are studying the Chechen war carefully and planning accordingly," he says. "We have no real option but to develop our 3,500 regulars and 5,000 paramilitary forces to fight a pitched battle as long as we can, but then we have to depend on paramilitary action. Even if I had ten well-trained battalions, I couldn't resist what the Russians could throw at me."

I point out that Estonia has no tanks. "What would I do with a tank? We don't need it, as Chechnya shows. Give each man anti-tank weapons and deploy to the field! Hit-and-run, open-plan, the way we did in Vietnam Special Forces. We'd do it. I'm trying to create a professional paramilitary sort of army here, a sort of..."



"A commando army?" I suggest.

The general wheels around like a howitzer pivoting on its axle. When he smiles, his face creaks. "Precisely. You got it. A commando army! That's it!... We would do exactly what the Chechens are doing. I would combine what I see in Chechnya with what I learned in Vietnam. We'd base resistance all over the country, distribute ammunition widely, fight in small bands."

Einseln has a jolly sense of humor with a great warmth. The warrior who hates war suddenly goes quiet: "I couldn't imagine that this late in history, in Europe, people are capable of what they're doing through the horror of war in Bosnia and now Chechnya." The general always speaks his mind, and it always gets him into trouble in his newly independent country. "We're building a state here with growing pains. I am building an army within the state and my objective is to clean out the military and use that to influence society. Armies don't function on cheating and lying!"

His mission in Estonia is to destroy the moral cancers of the Soviet system. Of course, delightful Estonia, with its 1.5 million people, is the most prosperous and stable of the ex-Soviet republics. Yet Einseln struggles against Soviet corruption with the mania of a Green Beret Savonarola. "This army's gotta exist in a democracy. When I found this Soviet institution, I had to dismantle before I could build. I dismissed useless and dishonest officers. I fired two more this morning. I reckon

I've fired 10 to 15 percent of our officer corps.

I had to root out thinking alien in a democratic society." He means the *dedovschina*, the Soviet Army's practice of torturing new recruits.

As a young boy, Einseln smuggled guns under hay to the so-called Forest Brothers, Estonian guerrillas waging a war of resistance against the Soviet Union. He and his mother escaped to the West. They spent four years in a displaced persons camp in Germany before emigrating to the United States in 1949. There he enlisted for the Korean War in the famous 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team. He served two tours in Vietnam, first with the Green Berets, later as a Regimental and Divisional "adviser" to the Vietnamese First Division in 1971-72, when the mayhem was nearing its climax.

After his six major campaigns in Vietnam—he does not like to talk about the battles—he was promoted to staff commands until he retired as a full U.S. Army Colonel in 1985. He had always kept in contact with the network of Estonian émigrés in the United States. In 1989 he began to campaign for Baltic independence. "But if you asked me five years ago if the Soviet Empire would fail and Estonia be free," he says, "I wouldn't have believed it would happen in my lifetime."

In May 1993 he was living in quiet retirement near Santa Barbara, California, when he was appointed Estonian commander. He decamped for Tallinn. His wife, a psychologist, stayed in California. But the anarchy left by the Soviets in his homeland dismayed him. "It was most depressing coming back," he says. "The burden

doesn't get to me. The sleaze gets to me." I ask the general if he likes his job.

"I miss California. I didn't want this job. I'm not liking it," he snarls. "I deal with sleaze and things that sergeants should deal with."

How long will he stay?

"As long as it takes to put this place in order."

Finally, the question: What happens if the Russians invade tomorrow?

"I could fight today!"

SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE is a frequent TNR contributor.

Any pro-choice Republicans out there?

DARLIN' ARLEN

By Ruth Shalit

There is a Specter haunting the Republican Party. An all-but-declared candidate in the early-starting 1996 GOP presidential primary, the three-term Pennsylvania senator was up in New Hampshire last week, blanketing the state with russet-colored pamphlets imploring voters to "JOIN HIM IN THE EFFORT TO RESTORE AMERICAN GREATNESS THROUGH TRADITIONAL REPUBLICAN VALUES." "I have solid credentials as a fiscal, economic conservative," Arlen Specter told skeptical reporters. "I voted for the Reagan tax cuts." The fliers, which blandly invoke Specter's schemes for cleaning up Congress and chopping the budget, obscure the strange drama of his candidacy. For when it comes to the red-meat issues at the center of Republican primary politics, Specter remains cheerfully unreconstructed. Describing himself not as a liberal, but as a Goldwater Republican—less government, more personal freedom—he is emerging as the only Republican candidate willing to square off against the party's right wing.

When Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition announced last month that religious conservatives would not countenance a pro-choicer on the Republican ticket, Specter lashed back. "If Ralph Reed says I'm unfit to be president because I'm pro-choice," he fumed, "I'm prepared to stand up and look him in the eye and tell him he's wrong—and raise hell about it." He has. Asked about surgeon general nominee Henry Foster, Specter vowed to "go to the mat . . . to oppose the idea that one ought to be disqualified from being surgeon general for performing a medical procedure legal under the U.S. Constitution."

Specter's position on the constitutionality of abortion, which he has proudly made the centerpiece of his

candidacy, is a little opaque. Despite his fulminations against the judicial activism of *Roe v. Wade*, he now claims to support the *Casey* decision, "written by three conservative Supreme Court justices." In fact, the constitutional distinction between the two cases is hard to discern, since *Casey* reaffirms the core of *Roe*.

But Specter considers himself a constitutionalist on other subjects as well. Decrying "a party divided by intolerance and bigotry," he insists there is a "biological basis" for sexual orientation. And it's not just on social issues that Specter breaks with the right. On the defining issue of tax cuts, he dismisses the bipartisan talk of a break for the middle class as an opportunistic "bidding war." He adds, "Before I talk about the Contract with America, I talk about our contract with the Constitution." Laudably, Specter opposes the House Republicans' effort to institute a "good faith exception" to the Fourth Amendment protection against unlawful search and seizure. "If you talk about a good faith exception when someone's made a technical mistake," he says, "you're pretty much eliminating the constitutional protection." The only Republican to speak in favor of President Clinton's crime bill, Specter prefers the original version to the gothic Republican replacement.

A tall, angular man who looks heartier than his 65 years, Specter can be an entertaining conversationalist. He insists on referring to Ralph Reed as "Ralph Reed Junior." Religious conservatives are "that fringe." "There goes that fringe again," he says. Like Vic Fazio and Joycelyn Elders before him, he decries the un-Christianness of the Christian right: "It is not Christian to deny Jefferson's wall of separation between church and state. It's not Christian to say pro-choice Republicans don't belong in the party." Shaking his head in befuddlement, he relates the story of his most recent appearance before the Iowa GOP Convention last year. "I expected to be booed when I discussed my efforts to take the anti-abortion plank out of the platform," he says, sincere anguish in his voice and face. "But I talked about the First Amendment, about that Jeffersonian wall of separation. And I was booed for that, too." That's when he decided "it was time for someone to stand up in the Republican Party and challenge the fringe."

Family-values conservatives resent the challenge. "I am very worried," sighs Gary Bauer of the Family Research Council. "Worried about the Republican Party miscalculating about the power of this whole galaxy of issues. Abortion. The homosexual agenda. If by some bizarre set of circumstances Specter succeeds, his success will guarantee a failure to regain the White House and maybe even loss of control of Congress." To guard against that possibility, Bauer has stepped up his own campaign of intimidation, scheduling meetings with Haley Barbour and Newt Gingrich, in which he warns darkly of "a social-issues Ross Perot" who will emerge in 1996 to challenge an excessively moderate Republican candidate.

It's these kinds of veiled threats that make Specter

see red. "When they say that a pro-choice Republican like Arlen Specter is not an appropriate nominee for the Republican Party—well, that makes second-class citizens out of a large percentage of the party," Specter gripes. He's right. According to a *New York Times* poll conducted in mid-February, up to 70 percent of Republicans consider themselves pro-choice. But so far they're not supporting Specter. Although his moderate message may reflect the mood of many voters, few insiders give him much hope of winning the nomination. In recent weeks, his poll numbers have oscillated between 2 percent and 3 percent.

Specter's handlers remain undeterred. "I'll tell you the interesting poll!" exults Marc Klugheit, Specter's chief counsel. "Forty-three percent of Republicans in New Hampshire say they will vote for a pro-choice candidate. Guess who the only pro-choice candidate is in New Hampshire? If we get 43 percent of the vote, where do we finish in the Republican primary in New Hampshire? That's right! We're first! By big numbers." Klugheit sticks his hands joyfully in his pockets and struts around the office. "Isn't the game exceeding expectations?" he wonders. "How much have we exceeded expectations if we finish first in New Hampshire?"

If movement conservatives loathe Specter, liberals gush all over him. He has enlisted the support of several key moderate Republicans, including Fred Grandy and Jim Leach of Iowa. Even Kate Michelman of the National Abortion Rights Action League is offering limited backing. "I am trying to be helpful in introducing him to major Republican supporters," Michelman admits. "Getting him connected. NARAL is really trying to help him." She has only kind words for Specter's long-shot crusade: "I must say, I just admire him so much," she says. "He has the courage to take on the toughest battle that exists in the Republican Party."

All the same, Michelman admits that Specter's zealous cross-examination of Anita Hill during Clarence Thomas's Supreme Court nomination hearings could cost him the very moderate vote he is soliciting. "Many of us were upset about his role in the Clarence Thomas nomination," she says. "It was so difficult for many of us to see him do that." Specter is eager to make amends. "Those hearings were a learning experience," Specter piously confesses. "For me and for America. I had no idea how much sexual harassment there was until the hearings were over." There has also been a healthy dose of P.R. "WHAT SOME WOMEN ARE SAYING ABOUT ARLEN SPECTER," coos a four-color brochure distributed to leery feminist contributors.

Why is a liberal Republican running for president in a conservative Republican moment? "I don't like where the country is heading," he intones. "And I don't like where the party is going." Indeed, his candidacy may not be entirely quixotic. Even if he doesn't capture the nomination, a strong showing could help him moderate the party platform. "The better he does, the more of a spokesman he can be at the convention and later in the year," says Roger Stone, a Specter consultant. Another

friend suggests a more prosaic motive for it all. "He's 65 years old," says the friend. "He wants to go through Iowa and New Hampshire just for the heck of it, just to see how he does. He doesn't have any grand illusions. But who knows? It's a crazy, weird year. Lightning might strike." Republicans should hope it does. •

John Brockman: pop science book agent.

SCIENCE MADE EASY

By Eric Konigsberg

In October, Basic Books introduced *The Science Masters*, a twenty-two-volume series of user-friendly books by highly regarded academics such as Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Leakey and Colin Blakemore. HarperCollins, Basic's parent company, has hailed the series as a sort of celebrity-penned *De Rerum Natura* for those who buy their books by the yard. "At last: your chance to attain scientific literacy straight from the SCIENCE MASTERS," reads the full-page ad in *The New York Review of Books*, and in *TNR*.

Unlike any similar reference-book venture, the series did not originate with a publisher or editor, but with the self-employed literary agent who eventually put together the deal. The agent, John Brockman, told associates he came up with the idea when a Japanese publisher asked him if he couldn't package "a dozen neat books on science, easy to hold on a Japanese commuter train; 40,000 words, please." For the *Science Masters*, Brockman was able to secure a \$1 million-plus advance—nearly \$1.5 million when you factor in foreign rights.

The *Science Masters* is not the first highly priced Brockman deal, nor is it his first lucrative venture into soft science. Over the past several years, Brockman has pulled off dozens of such deals. And should the *Science Masters* lose its publisher money, as publishing executives predict, that won't be a first for Brockman either. "There are two things you should know about John Brockman," says a top editor at Random House (which just last year paid more than \$400,000 for an upcoming book by MIT cognitive scientist Marvin Minsky, a deal one editor there called "a sure-fire bomb"). "The first is that there is probably no literary agent who sells as many six- and seven-figure books as he does. I mean, you should have John's tax bill to live off of. The second," adds the editor with some hyperbole, "is that virtually each of those deals has lost a mint for its publisher. It's safe to say he's the single-biggest money-loser for publishers there is."

Brockman's success is a case study in what's wrong

Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

The Real Victims

It's increasingly clear that the biggest roadblock to improving the achievement of U.S. students is violence and disorder in our schools. Education reformers say we must set high standards for student achievement and create curriculums and assessments embodying these standards—and I agree with them. But high standards and excellent curriculums and assessments are not enough. Indeed, they will be worthless if students cannot learn because they are constantly afraid of being hit by a stray bullet or because their classes are dominated by disruptive students. This is just common sense.

Earlier this year, *Washington Post* columnist Courtland Milloy told the story of a girl who had seen some classmates stab another student and was so terrified by the possibility of reprisals that she quit school ("An Education in Self-Help," January 29, 1995). This story has a relatively happy ending: The girl went on to earn a GED and is now attending college. But for every one who is motivated to continue her education the way this girl did, there are thousands and tens of thousands who are intimidated and distracted and are lost to school and learning.

Classroom disruption is more pervasive than school violence and just as fatal to learning. If there is one student in a class who constantly yells, curses out the teacher and picks on other students who are trying to listen or participate in class, you can be sure that most of the teacher's time will not be devoted to helping the other youngsters learn math or science or English; it will be spent figuring out how to contain this student. And it does not take many such students to ruin the learning of the great majority of youngsters in a school.

School officials seem generally to be at a loss. In Washington, D.C., and elsewhere, students who have been caught bringing guns or drugs to school or who have hurt other students may simply be transferred to another school or suspended for a little while. There seems to be a high level of tolerance for this kind of behavior where there should be none. And when it comes to chronically disruptive students, we are even more tolerant. Little happens to kids who merely keep others from learning.

Parents are painfully aware of these problems. That's why both African-American and white parents put safe and orderly schools at the top of their list of things that would improve student achievement. And that is undoubt-



We teach kids a bad lesson—that nothing will happen if they break the rules.

edly why vouchers and tuition tax credits are so popular—especially among many parents of kids in inner-city schools. These parents are saying, "If your schools are so violent and disorderly that our children can't learn—and are not even safe—let us put them in schools that won't tolerate kids who behave that way."

Many education experts insist that our first responsibility is to the few violent and disruptive kids. They say these kids have the "right" to an education, and we need to keep them in class and in school so we can help them overcome their problems. But what about the "rights" of the 25 or 30 kids in every class who come to school ready to work? Why are we willing to threaten their safety and learning? I'm not advocating putting violent or disruptive kids out on the streets. We need alternative programs for these youngsters, but we also need to change a system that sacrifices the overwhelming majority of children for a handful—without even doing the handful any good.

Most children come to school believing that doing right matters, but they soon learn to question that belief. Say a youngster in kindergarten does something that is way out of line—he knocks another kid down and kicks him. The other five-year-olds are sure something terrible is going to happen to this child, and they are very glad they're not in his place. Well, what happens? Probably the teacher gets in trouble for reporting the child. So their sense of justice—their belief that acting naughty has consequences—begins to be eroded. The youngster who defied the teacher becomes the de facto leader of the class, and peer pressure now encourages the other children to ignore what the teacher tells them to do. At a very early age, kids are taught a bad lesson—nothing will happen if they break the rules—and whatever else they learn in English or math or science, this lesson remains consistent throughout school.

We have an irrational system, and it's no wonder that angry parents are calling for vouchers, tuition tax credits—anything that would allow them to get their kids out of schools where a few violent and disruptive kids call the shots. What this means, though, is that 98 percent of students would be leaving public schools to get away from the 2 percent. Wouldn't it make a lot more sense just to move the 2 percent?

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1995 by Albert Shanker.

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with publishing. Consider some of his big scores, all published within the past few years: he sold Berkeley cosmologist George Smoot's *Wrinkles in Time* to William Morrow and Co. for \$400,000; and he convinced Doubleday to pay \$500,000 for *The Physics of Immortality* by Tulane physicist Frank Tipler and \$550,000 for Leakey's *Origins Reconsidered*. None of these books found the kind of readerships such advances assume—or even made money for its publisher. “We paid lots and we lost lots,” Howard Kaminsky, who at the time was the president of Hearst, Morrow’s parent company, says of *Wrinkles in Time*. The book sold, according to Morrow’s estimates, fewer than 20,000 copies. Leakey’s book reportedly did worse. Tipler’s made best-seller lists in a couple of cities. But for that kind of money, a book has to do more than end up on a few lists to earn out its advance; it has to be a huge hit. Tipler’s wasn’t.

Of course, you could argue, as some of the editors Brockman works with do, that at least he’s helping to disseminate scientific ideas, rewarding great minds for popularizing their work. “It’s nice that he’s getting real money for these people,” says Susan Rabiner of Basic Books. “I certainly feel better shelling out for them than for self-help books or something.” But not all important scholars write good books. In fact, some of them write bad ones. And that doesn’t matter in the least when you have Brockman-type marketing skills.

Brockman has proved particularly adept at exploiting the hunger for pop science books, often preying on editors who know little about science and are intimidated by the names and concepts he throws around. He tends to make his pitches to successively younger generations of editors: of the forty-odd editors I spoke with, most still buying from him had only been in the business a few years. Luckily for Brockman, there’s tremendous turnover in the book industry, with unseasoned editors in their 20s and 30s constantly being called up to acquiring positions.

Books that purport to explain big science to a befuddled public have been especially hot since 1989, when *A Brief History of Time*, written by Stephen W. Hawking (who is not represented by Brockman) sold

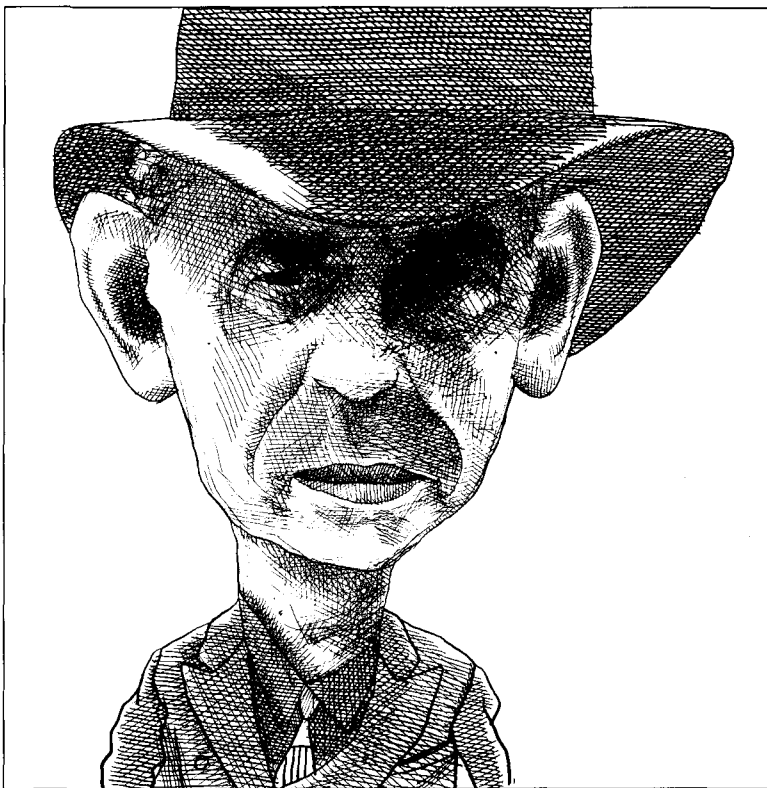
1 million copies in hardcover. “That book was a paradigm-wrecker,” says Simon & Schuster Vice President Bill Rosen. “Visions of Hawking dance like sugarplums in the eyes of many not particularly scientific-minded editors every time they see a popular science proposal.” But, says one editor who has bought a number of books from Brockman, “Frank Tipler is not congruent to Hawking. We’re finding that a lot of authors are not congruent to Hawking. Or Gould. Or [Richard] Feynmann. Maybe it’s not up to publishers to create the next science phenomenon. Maybe it should be up to scientists.”

Brockman, who declined several requests for an interview, seems to regard it as *his* job. Over the years, he has fashioned himself as a coolly dispassionate thinker, reticent but deep, capable of talking science on the level of his clients. At his farmhouse in Fairfield County, Connecticut, he stages gatherings of The Reality Club—the collective name he has given his clients. He also puts out a newsletter called *The Edge*, which consists of interviews by and with his clients. This serves Brockman in two ways: he gets to hang out with smart people, and he gets publicity within the scientific community.

But Brockman’s own journeys to intellectual glory have often fallen short. One particularly unfortunate attempt occurred in 1986, when Brockman wrote a book called

Einstein, Gertrude Stein, Wittgenstein & Frankenstein: Re-Inventing the Universe. The book, published by Viking Penguin, was pulled from shelves within hours of its delivery after reporter James Gleick of *The New York Times* saw an advance copy and discovered that it lifted substantially from an article Gleick himself had written for *The New York Times Magazine* in 1984. When the incident was first reported, Brockman told the *Times* his book was being recalled for “incomplete permissions clearance.” Gleick says, however, that Brockman explained the lapse to him by saying he hadn’t written the book himself—a ghostwriter had.

Yet Brockman does have a flair for the vague but catchy packaging of ideas. Among his first jobs was promoting Factory parties for Andy Warhol. He once wrote a book called *The Late John Brockman*,



JOHN BROCKMAN BY JOHN SPRINGS FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

which he described as “metaphysical free verse,” and which was full of blank pages and declarations such as “Nobody knows and you can’t find out.” His first coup as an agent came in 1983 when he capitalized on the emerging computer boom and sold *The Whole Earth Software Catalogue* to Doubleday for \$1.3 million—at the time, the most ever paid for a trade paperback. Although the book was a legendary dud, Brockman used the marquee value of the deal to stake out his territory in the soft-science market.

But couldn’t it be said that Brockman’s cowboy approach benefits his authors, even if it takes publishers to the cleaners? Yes and no. “He’s not like most agents, who’ll look at an author and then have four or five potential editors in mind who seem like a good match,” says Peter Osnos, publisher of Times Books. “He just goes for the most money.” Carol Gilligan, the feminist scholar whose upcoming book, her third, Brockman put on the market last spring, admits as much. “John does the proposal on his computer and pushes SEND for a dozen publishers more,” she says. “That drove me crazy. I wanted to work through relationships, get to know the potential editors of my book, then decide.”

In the case of Gilligan’s book, Brockman circulated the proposal to about ten editors and asked for a \$1 million advance. Gilligan’s first choice for an editor, Elizabeth Sifton at Farrar, Straus and Giroux, was never even invited to bid. When Sifton learned she had been excluded from the auction, she asked Brockman why. “Farrar, Straus can’t afford it,” he told her. (FSG publishes Scott Turow, Tom Wolfe and Susan Sontag, among other highly paid authors.) Sifton was furious, and Gilligan wasn’t pleased either, especially when all of the editors she’d told Brockman she would consider dropped out of the bidding. (A share of money-bags houses, none of which employed editors whom Gilligan wanted for her book, had been the only publishers up to Brockman’s stakes.) She ended up taking her book off the market until Brockman resubmitted it to editors she says she “felt comfortable with.” He sold the book, reluctantly, to Knopf, for a smaller advance that sources placed in the “mid-six-figure range.”

Gilligan, an accomplished writer, doesn’t need much hand-holding from an agent, and says that in the end she was satisfied with Brockman’s services. But many of Brockman’s academic clients are not as experienced in the ways of book publishing. “The agent’s job is not just to close the deal but to make sure that the publisher delivers on contractual agreements, make sure that the author finishes on time, maybe even help the author with a rewrite, or, if need be, help him resell his book if it gets turned down,” says a high-ranking editor at Norton. “But John gets the money and runs. He’s not even there to negotiate once the initial deal has been struck. I’d never accuse John Brockman of being an author’s advocate.”

In one notorious case that began in 1989, Brockman signed the Nobel Prize winner Murray Gell-Mann to a \$550,000 deal with Bantam (more

than \$1.4 million with foreign rights, which Brockman, unlike many agents, always retains) to write *The Quark and the Jaguar*, a book about complexity and artificial life. The bidding was the talk of the 1990 Frankfurt Book Fair, coming as it did in the midst of Hawking mania. No sooner had the deal been cemented than Brockman sold three competing books on the same subject: Roger Lewin’s *Complexity*, Steven Levy’s *Artificial Life* and Stuart Kauffman’s *The Origins of Order*. As a result, Bantam had to race to get Gell-Mann’s book out. Though he employed three ghostwriters, Gell-Mann missed two deadlines, whipped the book off in a few months and submitted a manuscript that Bantam promptly rejected as unreadable. Gell-Mann had to return the portion of his advance—one-quarter—that he’d already been given. Meanwhile, Brockman kept his 15 percent of that quarter (about \$20,000). When Brockman resold the book to the academic house W. H. Freeman, for \$50,000, Gell-Mann had to fork over \$20,000 of *that* to Bantam, to cover the money that Brockman had kept. When *The Quark and the Jaguar* finally came out, it was widely panned.

Gell-Mann wasn’t alone. A disproportionate number of Brockman’s authors have been forced to return their advances in recent years—in part perhaps because many of the proposals Brockman offers on behalf of his clients are too thin to give publishers much of an idea what they’re buying. Publishers keep ponying up anyway. One recent example is that of MIT cosmologist Alan Guth, whose contract—for \$250,000 from Bantam—was offered on the strength of a ghost-written proposal, but who tried, with disastrous results, to write the book himself. Guth had to return \$55,000 he’d been given and forfeit the rest.

As editors grow wary of Brockman’s track record, he has learned to repackage ideas. His newest rainmaking scheme, the middlebrow reference series, spawned not only the Science Masters but Master Classes, a forthcoming set of sixty arts-and-sciences volumes, in a multi-publisher deal for eight figures worldwide. But these series are based on flawed marketing. As Barry Lippman, the former editor in chief of MacMillan, reasons, “the books are too short for someone who has genuine interest, and if one sells, it doesn’t mean the others will—the subject matters are so different.”

Still, the publishing industry has a short memory and Brockman rolls on. The author whose first book failed to earn back an enormous first advance may find himself stuck, unable to get a second contract. But signing a big-money deal with the likes of Brockman can still get an editor into *Publisher’s Weekly* and make a publishing house look, however briefly, bold and deep-pocketed. And by the time the book comes out the editor who bought it may well have moved to another company anyway, leaving behind somebody new for a clever agent to have for lunch.

ERIC KONIGSBERG is a former TNR reporter-researcher.

WALL STREET BLUES

By Douglas W. Payne

If you plow through the articles in the financial press about the Mexican peso meltdown, you notice the same names offering expert opinions on the crisis over and over again. You also see that many of these figures are not exactly neutral. They are “analysts,” “strategists” or officers of investment banks and brokers that are major players in emerging global markets: Goldman, Sachs; Merrill Lynch; Fidelity Investments; Bear Stearns; Salomon Brothers; J.P. Morgan; and others. And if you read closely enough, you notice not only that the recent Mexican bailout saves the skins of Wall Street investors who gambled and lost, but also that some of these high-fliers weren’t just gambling. They were loading the dice.

In addition to the big firms, many lesser-known outfits pop up as well. Reading dozens of stories each day on the crisis, I came across many; but it was one name—the Weston Group—that kept ringing a bell. I went back through pre-meltdown files to find out why. What I discovered was a story, “SOME MUTUAL FUNDS WIELD GROWING CLOUD IN DEVELOPING NATIONS,” on the front page of the June 14, 1994 *Wall Street Journal*. Written by Craig Torres and Thomas T. Vogel Jr., it revealed that a number of Wall Street institutions, especially mutual fund underwriters, influenced the disastrous Mexican economic policies to a far greater degree than they are now admitting.

Torres, one of *The Wall Street Journal*’s Mexico City-based correspondents, has been the paper’s lead reporter on the crisis. Since December he has probably written more words and supplied more quotations from the usual suspects than anyone else. Most of these quotes analyzed what Mexico had done wrong: lax fiscal and monetary policies; a growing current account deficit (too many imports, not enough exports to pay for them); election-year politics. But it all circled back to the now-notorious *tesobonos*, short-term dollar-denominated bonds used to finance Mexico’s long-term debt.

Before 1994 *tesobonos* were not a big deal. Most investors opted for *cetes*, peso-denominated bonds, because they offered higher interest rates. Both *cetes* and *tesobonos* are short-term bonds that were offering hefty

returns, anywhere from 15 percent to 50 percent. The difference is that when an investor wants to cash in dollar-indexed *tesobonos*, Mexico must redeem them in pesos calculated in dollars; with *cetes*, they are calculated in pesos. That means that if the peso loses value, the Mexican government loses, not the *tesobono* investor.

None of that seemed to matter before 1994, since the Mexican government was committed to maintaining the value of the peso within its designated trading range, and NAFTA seemed to ensure a steady flow of foreign capital that would allow it to do so. Some concerns were expressed about the growing current account deficit and the overvalued peso, but with close to \$30 billion in hard currency reserves in Mexico’s central bank at the end of 1993 and investment flows expected to increase, most “analysts” said all was well.

In early 1994 the specter of political instability caused many investors to get cold feet. After the Chiapas uprising, the peso began to slide against the dollar, eroding the yields of *cetes* and other peso-denominated instruments. Then, after Luis Donaldo Colosio, the ruling party presidential candidate, was assassinated last March, hot money—security and bond investments, which account for more than half of all foreign investment in Mexico, indeed, in all of Latin America—started moving out of Mexico. The Mexican government, looking to reassure managers of U.S. mutual funds, promised that the peso’s slide would be halted.

It wasn’t, and U.S. fund managers took action. Some of them organized a consortium in April to lean on Mexico to insure the funds against a further weakening of the peso and to guarantee maximum returns on their investments. Do it, they made clear, or we will move our capital out of Mexico. That was what Torres and Vogel reported in *The Wall Street Journal* last June. And that brings us back to the Weston Group.

Soon after the peso melted down in December, it became clear that Mexico was in danger of defaulting on billions of dollars worth of *tesobonos*. But with Mexico’s central bank reserves dwindling, and with few investors expected to reinvest as in the past, Mexico found itself short of the cash needed to redeem them. Torres and David Wessel reported in *The Wall Street Journal* on December 29: “The reason for the mess is that, with foreign investment in these bonds increasing more

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Why We Must Reduce Immigration From Over One Million to 100,000 a Year

It Makes No Sense for Our Nation to Permit Massive Immigration

We now allow over one million immigrants to settle here every year. If our fertility rate remains at 2.0, continuing immigration at that level would swell our population to nearly 500 million before the end of the next century. **That would almost double our present size!**

Such growth would be intolerable. It would destroy our environment, our standard of living and the quality of our lives.

With a present population of 262 million, our country is already vastly overpopulated in terms of the long range carrying capacity of its resources and environment. Yet we continue to grow rapidly, by 25 to 30 million each decade.

We Need to Halt and Then Reverse Our Population Growth

We at NPG believe that our goal should be to stabilize our U.S. population at no more than 150 million, its size back in 1950. We consider that to be the optimum size for our country.

We Americans do not have to agree now on the exact size of a smaller population, however, since any substantial reduction in numbers would take many decades to achieve. It is only essential that we agree on the urgent need to halt and reverse our population growth.

Immigration Must Be Drastically Reduced

Because we have allowed our nation to become seriously overpopulated we are in deep trouble. A quick and easy solution simply does not exist. To start on the path toward a smaller, more sustainable population, we must halt illegal immigration and sharply reduce legal immigration.

Accordingly, NPG strongly recommends that legal immigration be cut back from its present 900,000 per year to no more than 100,000, including all relatives, refugees and asylees. We further call for an all-out effort to reduce illegal immigration, currently estimated at 300,000 a year, to as near zero as possible.

Best Case Scenario: Low Fertility, Low Immigration

What would happen to our population if our fertility rate were gradually reduced from the present 2.0 to 1.5 by 2050, if illegal immigration were virtually halted, and if legal immigration were reduced in 1996 from the present 900,000 a year to 100,000 a year, as we advocate?

The bad news is that our population would still continue growing for another 25 years, peaking at 300 million in 2020. **The good news** is that by the end of the next century it would have declined to around 180 million. In a few more years it would reach 150 million and could be stabilized at that level, even allowing a slight increase in fertility and/or immigration.

This is the path to a smaller population that NPG advocates.

Another Scenario: Low Fertility, High Immigration

If our fertility were reduced as in the "best case" scenario, but immigration remained at its present high level, the picture would be far worse.

1. Our population would continue growing for another 55 years, peaking in 2050 at 337 million, **75 million more than we are now.** Our impact on the environment would accordingly be that much greater.

2. Even by the end of the next century, our population would still be 298 million, 36 million greater than it is today, **and 121 million larger than it would be under the "best case" low immigration scenario.**

This is a path that our nation cannot afford to follow. **Clearly, the level of immigration will have a tremendous influence on the eventual size of our population.**

We Cannot Rely on Fertility Decline Alone to Reverse Our Population Growth

Fertility rates are difficult to change and when they do change, they almost always do so very slowly. Furthermore, future fertility rates are unpredictable: they might well increase rather than decrease. Over the last 18 years, for example, the trend has been upward, from a low of 1.7 in 1976 to 2.0 in the last few years.

That is all the more reason why we must reduce immigration to a level consistent with our long-term national interest. Reducing immigration is a much faster and more certain way to get results than relying on fertility decline.

If we can persuade our government to act **NOW** to halt illegal immigration — and to cut legal immigration from 900,000 to 100,000 a year — **we will at last be doing something** to brake runaway population growth in our country.

If you believe with us that immigration must be drastically curbed — and without further delay — then we ask you to work for this goal as a member of Negative Population Growth. We need your help.

NPG is a nonprofit, national membership organization established in 1972. Contributions to NPG are tax deductible to the extent the law allows.

Yes, I want to become a member of NPG, and help you work towards a smaller U.S. population. I am enclosing my check for annual membership dues.

___ \$30 ___ \$50 ___ \$100 ___ Other

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State ____ Zip _____

Mail to: **Negative Population Growth, Inc.**

210 The Plaza, P.O. Box 1206, Teaneck, NJ 07666

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than tenfold this year [1994], about \$9.72 billion in *tesobonos* will mature between now and the end of March, according to the Weston Group, a U.S. firm specializing in peso securities."

"Specializing," indeed. What Torres and Wessel did not point out in December, or in subsequent reporting, is that the Weston Group had organized the investor consortium last April to lean on the Mexican government. In June, however, Torres and Vogel *had* reported that Weston Group President John Liegey had quietly assembled a consortium that included Fidelity Investments Co.; Trust Co. of the West; Scudder, Stevens & Clark; Oppenheimer Management Corp.; Putnam Funds Management; Soros Fund Management; Salomon Brothers Inc.; Nomura Securities International Inc., a U.S. unit of Nomura Securities Co. of Japan; and the Weston Group. The Weston Group alone, according to Torres and Vogel, had brokered some \$5 billion in peso-securities trades for U.S. mutual funds in 1993.

The actions of the consortium—called the Weston Forum—explain in significant part why the Mexican government adopted policies that led to the meltdown. Liegey arranged two meetings for the Weston Forum with Mexican central bank officials and with Guillermo Ortiz, now Mexico's finance secretary, then the undersecretary. These meetings took place on April 8 and on April 20. The forum gave the Mexican officials a list of "policy suggestions" that now appear to have been far more in the short-term interest of the forum than in the long-term interest of the Mexican economy.

The forum wanted Mexico to slow the peso's daily devaluation. It wanted the government to insure investors against losses if the peso dipped below the prescribed range. And it wanted Mexican banks to be allowed to increase their hard currency liabilities to boost the Mexican banks' peso buying, which of course would then leave the banks at greater risk if the peso fell. In effect, the forum wanted Mexico to further overvalue the peso and assume the risk. Not a great deal for Mexico, but the Mexican government had little choice and the Weston Forum must have known it.

Mexico's state-party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), in power since 1929 and the longest ruling party in the world, was facing the most difficult election campaign in its history. It could afford no economic disruptions. It was already increasing pork-barrel and campaign spending and expanding domestic credit to artificially boost a stagnant economy. To devalue the overvalued peso before the election would have been political suicide. But the government was probably not very sanguine about what would happen after the election in August. Liegey was quoted in the June *Wall Street Journal* article saying the Weston Forum's suggestions "were a way to help the Mexicans out." But, as Torres and Vogel reported, these suggestions were not exactly negotiable. The day before the forum met with Ortiz on April 20, some forum members and other investors refused to buy enough peso-denominated *cetes* to

replace expiring ones, causing short-term interest rates to soar and Mexico's stock exchange to plunge.

The Mexican government got the message. Soon after the meeting with Ortiz Mexico issued longer-term *tesobonos*, as the Weston Forum had asked, and cut back on the size of auctions of *cetes*. Liegey told Torres and Vogel that as a result in less than two months foreign investors pumped about \$2.5 billion into the devaluation-insured *tesobonos*, up to half from Weston Forum members. Liegey said that the forum was pressing Mexico to implement more of its suggestions, but "we've gotten a good portion of what we asked for." Torres noted, "Mexican officials acknowledge that the fund managers are important players in their economy. But they deny that they are bowing to the Weston Forum's demands."

Given that the actions of the Weston Forum were reported on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* last June, it is intriguing that in the current news stories about the crisis reporters and the familiar quote merchants seem perplexed as to why Mexico implemented the policies it did. For example, in the January 14-15 weekend edition of *The Financial Times* reporters Stephen Fidler and Ted Bardacke noted, "The transfer of devaluation risk from foreign investors to the Mexican government throughout 1994 cost the government dear." Left unanswered was why the Mexican government chose to transfer the risk. And in *The Journal of Commerce* on January 31 Kevin G. Hall wrote, "The over-reliance on *tesobonos* is now at the center of Mexico's economic crisis because some \$29 billion worth of the debt instruments will mature this year." He noted that Mexico's central bank boosted sales of *tesobonos* in August and September "against the grain of economic signs." Hall quoted Jorge O. Mariscal of Goldman, Sachs and an "analyst at a major U.S. financial institution who did not want to be identified." Mariscal and the analyst questioned why the central bank did not adopt restrictive monetary policies in 1994 and instead ordered a large expansion of short-term capital by boosting sales of *tesobonos*.

At least part of the answer is in Torres and Vogel's article in *The Wall Street Journal* last June, which Hall, Fidler and Bardacke seem to have overlooked. Of course Torres seems to have forgotten that article himself; he is still relying on the Weston Group, and the other usual suspects, for comment on the crisis, as if Weston were simply a knowledgeable bystander, not a key player.

The question of fiduciary responsibility in the conduct of the Weston Forum and other investors needs to be addressed. They appear to have been willing to take huge sums of money belonging to clients who may not fully understand what is at stake, and to use those sums not just to bet on emerging markets but to leverage governments into potentially disastrous policies because those policies would maximize short-term profits. But when the bubble bursts at least in part because of those policies, we find them in the financial press expressing their "expert" judgment that the United States should come to the rescue. •

REVENGE OF THE SQUARES

By Fred Barnes

Newt Gingrich's least familiar accomplishment as House speaker is also his most telling: the killing of the Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution. Gingrich was appalled at a taxpayer-funded display that condemned the dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945 and sympathized with the Japanese. He met once with Smithsonian Secretary I. Michael Heyman and talked to him twice by phone. Heyman got the message. He and Gingrich negotiated an alternative. Only the Enola Gay, the plane that dropped the bomb, would go on display. Asked his objections to the exhibit, Gingrich said, "You mean other than the fact it was historically inaccurate, anti-American, and distorted history?" Yes, other than that. Well, said Gingrich, it reflected "the enormous underlying pressure in the elite intelligentsia to be anti-American, to despise American culture, to rewrite history and to espouse a set of values which are essentially destructive."

A lot of what motivates Gingrich and his team of House Republican leaders is packed into the Enola Gay episode. Their ambitions reach far beyond the Contract with America and its mostly procedural and economic reforms. While eager to curb the role of government in American life, they're also keen to uproot values they believe harmful, especially to the poor. You know, values like multiculturalism, permissive sexuality, lack of respect for religion and the work ethic, disdain for the traditional teaching of American history and lifestyles. They identify these values with a left-liberal elite that rose to prominence during the 1960s and that, according to Gingrich, includes Bill and Hillary Rodham Clinton. Gingrich gives speeches on "renewing American civilization" and talks of restoring to full authority "the bourgeois system which has dominated the country for 200 years." He's not kidding. His enemy is "the Great Society counterculture model." In other words, the 1960s.

There's another component to this countercultural backlash. The Gingrich team—Majority Leader Dick Armey and Whip Tom DeLay of Texas, Gingrich pal Bob Walker of Pennsylvania, and Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston of Louisiana, plus the speaker—has remodeled conservatism and made it more fashionable. And since the Gingrich group is, for now, the driving force in American politics, it's likely

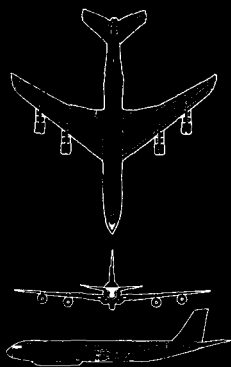
to impose this dogma on other conservatives, the Republican Party and perhaps a majority of Americans. Already the Senate is filling up with adherents. Many were House cohorts of Gingrich: Majority Whip Trent Lott of Mississippi, Connie Mack of Florida, Dan Coats of Indiana. The irony is that Gingrich and the rest were shaped by the '60s, the era whose legacy they want to extinguish. They're the flip side of the '60s Generation that drew all the attention from the press and historians.

What does the retooled ideology consist of? The starting point is Ronald Reagan. Gingrich defines conservative politicians as pre-Reagan (Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, for example) or post-Reagan (himself). The post-Reaganites grew up politically under Reagan and now want to update his thinking. "It's like taking a draft and editing it," says Gingrich adviser Grover Norquist, who heads Americans for Tax Reform. "Even with a lot of editing, there's still a draft and it's Reagan."

Tenet number one is supply-side economics. While Reagan was inconsistent, cutting taxes and then raising them, post-Reagan conservatism is fanatically tax-phobic. As avid as the Gingrich team is to eliminate the deficit, it won't consider a tax increase. Why not? That would be counterproductive, according to their model, slowing economic growth and reducing tax revenues. The supply-side solution is to cut taxes, especially capital gains, to spur growth. Tenet two is a social policy based on conservative ideas of empowerment: vouchers for education and housing, enterprise zones. Number three is a commitment to new technology. Number four is traditional values. Other tenets include free trade, internationalism combined with hostility toward the United Nations and support for Star Wars. Unlike Reagan, who flirted with scrapping the Voting Rights Act, the Gingrich team believes in civil rights and racial equality. But affirmative action and racial preferences—ideas born in the '60s—are another matter.

The post-Reaganites experienced the '60s differently from their rebellious brothers and sisters. The media-anointed avatars of the era protested American intervention in Vietnam, avoided the draft, tried drugs, challenged bourgeois values and dabbled in radicalism

continued on page 26



* Surveillance

*The ability to monitor
an entire theater of
operations and share threat
and target information in
real time. Example:
the Joint STARS
surveillance aircraft.*

When integrated with
the ability to strike with
stealth and precision,
these capabilities and the
core technologies they
represent allow new
levels of coordination in
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before entering mainstream politics on the left. Nobody on Gingrich's team demonstrated against the war. Quite the contrary. As a young aide to a House member from Pennsylvania, Walker often appeared as a *pro-war* spokesman in campus debates. He was "deeply affected" by the 1970 killing of four protesters at Kent State in Ohio by National Guardsmen—but that's because as a member of the Pennsylvania Guard, trained for riot duty, he had identified with the shooters. "That could well have been us being put in an untenable situation," he says. DeLay, as a student at the University of Houston, attended antiwar protests, but only to shout down demonstrators. Livingston didn't burn his draft card—he served two years in the Navy—but did torch anti-draft leaflets at a campus demonstration. He was pictured on the front page of the Tulane University student newspaper in the act of destruction. "I was a counter-revolutionary," he says.

What's striking about the five GOP leaders is their homogeneity. All became Republicans at an early age—Gingrich at 9, DeLay in junior high. They're close in age: Arney is the oldest at 54, DeLay the youngest at 48. Walker is 52, Gingrich and Livingston, 51. None went to Ivy League or elite schools. Arney got his B.A. at Jamestown College in North Dakota, his M.A. in economics at the University of North Dakota and his Ph.D. at the University of Oklahoma. Walker graduated from Millersville State College in Pennsylvania, where his father taught history. Livingston got his B.A. and law degree at Tulane. DeLay was thrown out of Baylor University, a Baptist school—his sins were dancing and painting buildings green at rival Texas A&M—and later graduated from Houston. Gingrich got his B.A. at Emory University in Atlanta, his M.A. and Ph.D. in history at Tulane.

The emerging counterculture left all of them cold. Gingrich is the only one to have smoked marijuana. ("That was a sign we were alive and were in graduate school in that era," he said on "Meet the Press" last December.) Livingstone says, "Booze was our stuff." DeLay was "totally, totally" repelled by the counter-

culture. "I didn't buy into that at all." Like the others, DeLay married young—just after his sophomore year in college. Gingrich was 19 when he wed his high school geometry teacher. Livingston married as an undergraduate, Arney the day he got his B.A. (Arney and Gingrich later divorced and remarried.) Youthful rebellion and protests were "very remote to my life," says Arney. "The day you marry is the day you become immersed in how you're going to support yourself. I was too busy. I had to get my thesis done." Teaching an economics class in 1968, Arney noticed a student in the back row who habitually wore a blank look. When informed that the guy usually smoked a joint before class, Arney had to ask what a joint was.

As young conservatives, the Gingrich crew developed a fervent belief in entrepreneurial capitalism and the laissez-faire policies that support it. Yet only DeLay practiced what he preached. Gingrich and Arney taught college before serving in Congress; Walker was a schoolteacher and congressional aide; Livingston, a lawyer who found private practice unpleasant, spent far more time as a prosecutor. Fresh out of college, DeLay went to work at a pesticide plant in Houston. Denied a raise and a share in the business, he



BOB WALKER BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

quit in 1973 and started his own pest-control firm, or as he puts it, "I bought a truck and started killing bugs." Taxes and regulations turned him into "a free-market nut," DeLay says. His 1978 taxes exceeded his gross income in 1976. "And every time I turned around there were new regulations ... I believe in capitalism at my inner, inner soul."

Ideological kinship among these counter-counter-culturites has so far bred extraordinary unity. It's not the usual order of things, for Democrats or Republicans: in the past, the speaker, majority leader, whip and caucus chairman have managed their own fiefdoms. As recently as 1992, GOP leaders were painfully divided. Bob Michel operated one way, as leader, then-whip Gingrich another. Caucus Chairman Jerry Lewis and Policy Committee Chief Mickey Edwards had their own

duchies. That began to change when Arney ousted Lewis as caucus boss in November 1992. "I put aside Arney's ego and he put aside mine," Gingrich quipped. By early 1993, the Gingrich team had come together, minus Livingston but including a younger member, Bill Paxton of New York, chairman of the GOP Congressional Campaign Committee. They met furtively at first. By 1994 they'd become the public face of resurgent conservatism.

In the beginning, there was only Bob Walker. Elected back in 1976 to replace his boss, Edwin Eshleman, Walker anticipated the rhetorical innovation that would become the hallmark of post-Reagan conservatives: relentless confrontation. He volunteered for the Republican floor patrol, three GOP representatives whose job was to make life miserable for the Democratic majority. By exploiting the parliamentary tactic of "reserving the right to object," they horned into most House business. Soon Democrats recognized that if they weren't careful, they would have to deal with Walker. GOP leaders took advantage of this, using Walker as an excuse for not cooperating with Democrats: pointing across the floor at Walker they'd say, we'd like to help, but he'd raise hell.

When Gingrich arrived in 1978, Walker got his first close ally. "He established himself as someone who'd be an activist and someone the leadership had to contend with," says Walker. Then, as now, Gingrich was brimming with ideological and partisan zeal. He talked about saving American civilization, challenging the corrupt Democratic majority and transforming House elections into referenda on national instead of local issues. Recognize these hardy perennials of Newtpeak? "He always waxed poetic about things cosmic," says his Atlanta friend John Linder, who began working on Republican Party-building with him two decades ago. "I told him if he could bottle the stuff and sell it to the average person, he'd be rich and famous. Well, he's famous." Gingrich was always deadly earnest about his agenda. "Newt is not funny," says Linder, who was him-

self elected to the House in 1992. "Newt is as serious as a heart attack."

Gingrich went national in fall 1980, organizing a mass GOP event on the Capitol steps in which Ronald Reagan, the presidential nominee, and congressional candidates endorsed a common agenda. It was a precursor to the Contract with America, and it got media attention. Still, Walker and Gingrich were nonentities in 1981 and 1982. Reagan was president, and he relied on official Republican leaders, plus Democratic boll weevils, to get his spending and tax cuts enacted. In 1982, however, Gingrich recruited a new brother-in-arms, Vin Weber of Minnesota. Gingrich, Walker and Weber then took a bold step: they

formed a rump group and named it after their political ideal, the Conservative Opportunity Society.

COS proved to be a bonding experience, and with it, the Gingrich forces stepped up their game a notch. Walker's insights were critical. "He understood two things," Weber says. "Number one, the need to move the argument out of the committees and onto the floor. And number two, the importance of C-SPAN," the cable network that televises all House floor proceedings. Walker found that speeches to an empty House cham-



DICK ARNEY BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

ber, after regular business, drew an audience of 300,000 to 500,000. He had fans. In Iowa C-SPAN devotees formed their own club; Walker was their hero. Jack Kemp, a father figure to COSers, argued that C-SPAN was a waste of time, but Gingrich disagreed. Every day at the end of business, Gingrich and friends would gather in the back of the chamber and decide what issues to stress. Often they zinged Democrats for barring conservative bills or blocking a vote on measures such as the Balanced Budget Amendment.

C-SPAN also produced a fresh recruit: Arney. During the 1970s, which he calls a "period of economic terror," he had become discouraged with America's drift. "I seriously thought about emigrating," he says. But in the early 1980s, while an economics professor at North Texas University near Dallas, he became an avid viewer

of C-SPAN. Watching Gingrich and others, "I saw there was a band of cavaliers I could join." He'd also soured on teaching. In 1984 he ran against a popular Democratic incumbent, Tom Vandergriff, and won because of redistricting and the Reagan re-election tide. Arriving in Washington, he sought out Gingrich. "Ronald Reagan gave me hope," Armey told him. "You gave me a reason to run." DeLay, the self-described "bug-killer from Houston," was elected the same year. When House GOP leaders advised him to avoid Gingrich and his troublemakers, DeLay, who had been in the Texas Legislature for six years, decided at first to go along.

By 1985, though, Gingrich was proving you didn't have to go along to get ahead in Congress. The year before, cos had steamrolled Reagan operatives and rammed a no-new-taxes pledge into the GOP platform. It didn't hurt when Democrats seated Frank McCloskey as an Indiana representative though state officials had certified Republican Richard McIntyre as the winner. "It validated Gingrich's message," says Weber—namely that Democrats would always run roughshod over the GOP minority and that Republicans should refuse to cooperate with them. In 1989 Gingrich's persistence succeeded in driving House Speaker Jim Wright out of Congress on ethics grounds. "That validated Newt as a person and convinced everyone he had leadership qualities," Weber says.

The moment Dick Cheney resigned as House Republican whip in 1989 to become defense secretary, Walker called Gingrich in Georgia and said, "Of course you're going to run." Gingrich was elected whip by one vote. (DeLay managed the campaign of Gingrich's opponent, Ed Madigan of Illinois. "I made a mistake," he conceded later.) As the second-ranking Republican, Gingrich was hardly a team player. Summoned to the White House in 1990 to endorse a budget compromise that included a tax increase, Gingrich refused. He walked alone from the White House as President Bush announced the deal at a Rose Garden ceremony. Bush was angry, but Gingrich's defiance consolidated his power in the House. Bob Michel was still minority leader, but Gingrich was really in command.

After the 1992 election, Armey, too, sought a leadership post; challenging Jerry Lewis of California as caucus chairman he won by a mere two votes. Together, Gingrich and Armey had catapulted into the leadership by three votes. Had they lost, insists a Republican aide, the world would be different today. "We'd be talking about who'd be in the picture of the signing ceremony at the Clinton White House for the bipartisan health care bill." Meanwhile, DeLay was elected to the No. 4 post, creating a potentially awkward situation. But DeLay was a close friend of Armey, and Gingrich gradually accepted him as a fellow revolutionary—conservative, highly ideological and combative in the extreme.

The most delicate problem for the Gingrich team was

Michel, the low-key GOP leader. It was rumored Michel would retire in 1994, but no one knew for certain. And in early 1993 Michel began chairing long-range planning meetings of the Republican hierarchy. The sessions wandered, never reaching closure and violating management guru Peter Drucker's rule, touted by Gingrich, that no meeting should exceed ninety minutes. Gingrich chafed. (As speaker, Gingrich routinely violates the Drucker rule.) In mid-1993, he, Armey, DeLay and Walker began convening secretly in restaurants on the fringe of Capitol Hill. The jihad, a Republican staffer dubbed them. They were joined by Paxon, a Gingrich protégé as Campaign Committee chairman, and later by John Kasich of Ohio, now chairman of the House Budget Committee. Weber was absent, having left Congress in 1992. Armey was guarded at first, his body language wary. He sat at an angle to the group. But after a few meetings there was a moment of bonding. Armey asked, "Are we in this for keeps? Are we watching each other's backs?" They agreed never to go off the record with a reporter and criticize one another. And if one committed a gaffe, as Armey did with his "Barney Fag" slip, the others would stand by him. The jihad produced two things: Gingrich's decision to run for Republican leader after the 1994 election, whether or not Michel retired (he did); and the Contract with America, the most important Republican document since *The Conscience of a Conservative*, by Barry Goldwater.

The final recruit to the team was Livingston, elected to the House in 1977 after the incumbent was jailed for vote fraud. Livingston sat next to Gingrich on the Public Works Committee; they were ideologically in tune. And he and Armey were fishing pals. Livingston was a latecomer to Gingrich's two leadership races, and Gingrich owed him nothing. But Livingston filled a need. Gingrich wanted another of his protégés, John Boehner of Ohio, to take over as caucus chairman, the job Livingston was seeking last fall. Gingrich also wanted an appropriations chairman who would attack spending with a cleaver, not a scalpel. So he jumped Livingston over four senior Republicans on appropriations, instantly making him one of the most powerful members of Congress. The team was set, ready to reverse the 1960s.

It was Livingston who gave Gingrich the idea of killing the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Last November Livingston appeared before the House Republican Steering Committee to lock up the appropriations post. Gingrich had already wired that, but Livingston went ahead with his pledge to whack spending. If CPB, NEA and NEH couldn't be "zeroed out," then Republicans might as well give up hope on curbing spending. "It was just off the top of my head," Livingston says. Within days, Gingrich was calling for eliminating the three agencies. And the more he thought about it, the more steamed he got. CPB is a boon only to "a bunch of rich upper-class people who want their toy to play with," he

told Brian Lamb of C-SPAN in January. NEA provides "art patronage for an elite." NEH proposed history standards "that are destructive for American civilization."

Killing CPB, NEA and NEH appeals to Gingrich on two levels, the fiscal and the cultural. "I'm against them for Jeffersonian reasons," he told me. "I don't like the government having unnecessary power. We should ask of every program: Is this absolutely, unavoidably necessary?" The cultural reasons—all three institutions were created during the Great Society era and sometimes foster 1960s values favored by a liberal elite—are only "marginally" a factor, he claims. But I wonder. In Gingrich's analysis of the 1960s ("the whole system began decaying"), the elite play a key role. By his definition, they're the liberal folks in politics, the media, academia and even some financial circles who establish the zeitgeist and shape the culture. Gingrich agrees with the thesis of Jeffrey Bell's *Populism and Elitism*, namely that the elite changed course in 1968 in the face of burgeoning antiwar protests, lost faith in America and especially the middle class and began to swallow the counterculture's values. If you accept that, you're bound to be leery of CPB, NEA and NEA.

Gingrich has, in fact, developed a theory of American history in which the 1960s represent a crucial break, "a discontinuity." From 1607 down till 1965, "there is a core pattern to American history. Here's how we did it until the Great Society messed everything up: don't work, don't eat; your salvation is spiritual; the government by definition can't save you; governments are into maintenance and all good reforms are into transformation." Then, "from 1965 to 1994, we did strange and weird things as a country. Now we're done with that and we have to recover. The counterculture is a momentary aberration in American history that will be looked back upon as a quaint period of Bohemianism brought to the national elite."

Gingrich's problem with the counterculture and the '60s is not just their anti-bourgeois attitude, which he sums this way: "If you're dull and you're mediocre and

you run a dry cleaner and go to Rotary and Kiwanis, you're essentially banal." No, the real problem, he says, is that 1960s values "are in practical terms extraordinarily destructive. Multipartner sex leads to AIDS. Drug use, while benign for some people, has a tendency to lead many people to addiction and ultimately ruin their life. Irresponsibility is fine if you're a millionaire's child and you can hire a nanny. Irresponsibility is a tragedy if you're very poor and your one hope of getting out of poverty is to not get pregnant. Go down the list." Gingrich, on a rhetorical roll, goes down it. "Again and again, they taught self-indulgent, aristocratic values without realizing that if an entire society engaged in the indulgences of an elite few, you could tear the society to

shreds." Gingrich's teammates agree with him. "To me, all the problems began in the '60s," says Armeiy.

But can Congress help cure the culture? Gingrich says yes. "First of all by the people appointed to the Smithsonian board. Second by zeroing out institutions that are not particularly helpful. Third by having an active effort in the Congress itself to communicate how America works." But let's return to what he mentioned first, the Smithsonian. Gingrich created a spot on the institution's board for the House member most likely



TOM DELAY BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

to give museum directors heartburn, Sam Johnson of Dallas, an Air Force fighter-pilot for twenty-seven years and a POW in Vietnam for seven. It was Johnson who alerted Gingrich to the Enola Gay exhibit ("biased toward Japan") at the Air and Space Museum. Now Johnson is looking at other museums. Many conservatives, most notably Bill Bennett, doubt Washington can have a real impact on the culture, but Johnson is persuaded. "I don't see why not. If we do a good job on welfare reform and reducing spending and cutting back nonessential programs, that has to affect society and the way we live. This Congress has an opportunity to change the face of America. Newt is guiding that." Indeed, he is. And Gingrich says by the time Congress finishes its work this year, America will be a "different country" and the '60s a fading force. •

BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Altered Lives

The Czech director Jiří Weiss was born in 1913 and won his first film prize, for a documentary, in 1934. Rapidly he became an outstanding figure in the prewar Czech cinema. As Hitler loomed, Weiss, a Jew, moved to Britain where, for government units, he made his first fiction films. Then he joined the U.S. Signal Corps, and after the war he returned home. Again he became outstanding; yet again, this time because of growing Soviet pressures, he went into exile. He worked and taught in the U.S. When the atmosphere changed, he returned to his own country, where once more he became a film stalwart.

In 1989, aged 76, Weiss wrote *Martha and I*, derived from youthful memories, and in 1990 he directed it. Now, in 1995, after it has won prizes for Weiss and for his leading actors at several festivals, it is released here (by Cinema Four). With this film, Weiss enters the circle of marathon winners, along with Buñuel, Lean, Huston and others—directors who did notable work in their 70s. *Martha and I* is lovely. Sad but lovely.

The story deals with three people, which makes the title slightly ambiguous. The “I” is presumably Emil, the Czech boy whom we see growing up and whose voice, as a man, occasionally reminisces on the soundtrack. But Emil is absent for a stretch toward the end, and in any case the center is the relationships between Martha and both Emil and his uncle. So the “I” does double duty.

In 1935 Emil is in his early teens, the son of a well-to-do Jewish woman in Prague. One day she discovers him discovering amour with the maid, and she

packs the boy off to her brother in the town of Brůx. Uncle Ernst is a gynecologist, a free-thinking man who encourages Emil to read Boccaccio. When Ernst’s much younger Hungarian wife is unfaithful to him, he divorces her, less in anger than in acceptance of the inevitable. Much more faithful to him is his cook and maid, Martha, a quiet, solid German woman, loving and gentle, who becomes maternally fond of Emil. It seems sensibly inevitable that Ernst marry Martha, which surprises neighbors but pleases Emil.

The warm, crinkly chronicle of life in the doctor’s home, with friends and music and medical practice, gets its first crude jog when Martha’s brother, *echt deutsch*, is invited to dinner and bursts out against one of the other guests, a Jew. The brother has become a fervent Nazi—as did many in Czechoslovakia during the 1930s—and this allows us to preview the rest of the film. Chillingly.

Eventually Ernst is forced to leave

Brůx. He moves to Prague with Martha and Emil. Eventually, too, Martha is abducted by her brothers—she has two—and is willy-nilly divorced from her Jewish husband. Emil, prompted by his uncle, flees the country. He isn’t seen again until he returns after the war, in British uniform, to learn what happened to his family, including Martha.

Weiss, concerned with this humane exception of a Nazi’s sister devoted to her Jewish husband, directs with comprehending reticence. He knows so much about his material that he is careful to say only what is necessary. Everything we see—a town street, a kitchen table—speaks of the place it is in and the long years behind it. Weiss made his film in locations where, he knows, matters much like his story actually occurred. An artist’s biography is of course irrelevant to judgment of his work, but it’s sometimes hard to forget. Why forget it in this case?

Quickly I add that, by any standards, Weiss’s direction is fluent: dramatically sure, visually acute without artiness. He has cast his film perfectly and has drawn from his actors exactly the performances we want even though we didn’t know it in advance. This is all the more remarkable because in most cases he had to do double casting, presences and voices. The dialogue is in German, as it needed to be for those people at that time, but most of the cast had to be dubbed. (Not something I generally applaud, but here it was apparently necessary. Most of the available actors speak Czech or Slovak.)

The one native German is Marianne Saegebrecht, who is Martha. Saegebrecht is the obese woman who was used, chiefly by Percy Adlon, in films that strove so feverishly for cult status that I could hardly wait for them to fall into cult hands. Here Weiss has treated Saegebrecht as an actress, and she has responded with sincerity, even finesse. It’s easy to understand why, despite Martha’s servile background and her size, the middle-aging doctor wanted to marry her.

He is played by Michel Piccoli. No,

FILMS WORTH SEEING

The Madness of King George. Sparkling dialogue, polished acting, dazzling directing. The mad English king’s eighteenth-century court as a microcosm of timeless politicking and intrigue. (Reviewed 1/30/95) **Miami Rhapsody.** In this very entertaining debut by writer-director David Frankel, a well-to-do Jewish family in Miami encounters contemporary sex, including romps with a black fashion model and a male Cuban nurse. **Mina Tannenbaum.** The intertwined lives of two Jewish Parisiennes, Mina and her friend Ethel, both b. 1958. A generally enchanting debut by writer-director Martine Dugowson. (3/6/95) **Window to Paris.** A Russian fantasy. People in St. Petersburg step through a window right into central Paris—with excitement and some regret. Witty, graceful, trenchant. (2/27/95)—SK

that is not a misprint: apparently some French financing depended on the use of Piccoli. All for the good. This silken diabolist turns to face us straight on, so to speak, and gives us a colorful, wise, engaging character. Václav Chalupa and Ondrej Vetchy, as the earlier and later Emil, fulfill their parts in the pattern.

More Weiss, please. Let's look forward to the next.

Shallow Grave (Gramercy) is a study in transmutation. Meant as a thriller, it does have some thrills; and it's also a drama of moral disintegration. But what's most interesting is its formal change. It begins and continues for a while as a British breeze, somewhat in the vein of *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Then, touch by touch, the lighting, editing, acting bring about a dramaturgic change. It becomes a quite different film. This change—not an inconsistency but an organic evolution—has more of a moral charge than anything the picture “says.”

In Glasgow, three young people share a large flat. The one woman is a doctor; the two men are a journalist and an accountant. The three want to sublet a room in their flat. They advertise, then put applicants through sharp comic

quizzes. Finally they select a smooth man in his 30s who says he is a novelist.

The next morning he doesn't come out of his room. The three break in to find him naked and dead. Drugs, apparently. Then they get a greater shock. One of the man's suitcases is crammed with cash, large bills. Their brittleness cracks. They are less funny now. In a comparatively short time, they decide to dispose of the body and keep the money. From this decision, all else follows.

The three are played by Kerry Fox, who was Janet Frame in *An Angel at My Table*, Christopher Eccleston and Ewan McGregor, and all—especially Fox—do well. Danny Boyle directed sunnily in the opening section and with hard-breathing intensity thereafter. The screenplay is by John Hodge, a Scottish doctor practicing in London, and it gleams or frightens as it should; but there is one big flaw in the plot.

These three people are shown to be exceptionally intelligent. How could three such people discover a suitcase full of money and, whatever their ethical attitudes, be unaware of invisible strings attached to it? How could they not foretell that there would be rough consequences? •

Hope Against Hope

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency by Elizabeth Drew

(Simon & Schuster, 462 pp., \$24)

Middle Class Dreams: The Politics of the American Majority by Stanley B. Greenberg

(Times Books, 352 pp., \$25)

Can this administration be saved? Neither Elizabeth Drew nor Stanley Greenberg would say that it can't, but their prescriptions would be completely at odds. Drew's book executes, in a more elegant and stately fashion, the same mission as Bob Woodward's *The Agenda*: it creates a backstage portrait of the Clinton White House, in the voice of an omniscient third-person narrator, on the basis of many interviews with big shots who usually aren't quoted by name. Therefore its camera is relentlessly kept pulled in close—not so much to Clinton

himself, to whom Drew seems to have had minimal direct access, as to the people immediately around him. Drew's story line is built around the top-level management of major Washington events (sample chapter titles: “Stimulus,” “Bosnia,” “NAFTA”). Her implication is that if they had been handled better, Clinton would be in a stronger position today.

Stanley Greenberg, Clinton's pollster, was obviously a source for Drew. Although this gets him the customary reward of not being criticized personally, Drew disapproves of “the prominent, and unprecedented, role” that he, along with Paul

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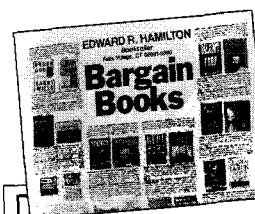
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Begala and Mandy Grunwald, have played in the administration. "They could sashay into the White House, offer some advice, and sashay out again, leaving the hard part to others," she complains. She has Greenberg, for example, heavily influencing Bosnia policy, helping to quash the appointment of Stephen Breyer to the Supreme Court on the first go-round, banishing the use of the term "managed competition" to describe the health care plan—and finally, to her obvious relief, being forbade by Leon Panetta to have one-on-one meetings with Clinton. (Clinton himself is rumored to have become disaffected with Greenberg because Greenberg did a well-publicized post-election poll for the Democratic Leadership Council demonstrating the electorate's low esteem for Clinton.) Drew finds the former campaign consultants to be "simplistic." Greenberg, without mentioning Drew, returns the compliment by mocking the things she and other leading Washington reporters pay attention to as being merely temporal concerns that "obscure our understanding of what is really happening in our politics":

Gays in the military. Whitewater and commodity trading. An admired First Lady, battling for kids and health care, lobbying Congress, but does she wield too much power? Bosnia. Sarajevo.... Paula Jones. Interest rates down, interest rates up. Three strikes and you're out.... Poll ratings down. Poll ratings up.

Of course this is precisely the stuff of Drew's book. She is working here in the manner of her *New Yorker* letters from Washington, with their faint air of nineteenth-century dispatch journalism: the technique is to recapitulate events in a leisurely, dry, affectless tone, as if to be read by an audience with no reliable access to daily news. To enjoy it requires a kind of submission—a suspension of impatience over repetition of the familiar and of curiosity about what she has that is new (since she won't tell you). Another of the conventions of the form is that Drew can deliver her own views only in the form of slightly ironic asides. Still, it's quite clear what they are. It isn't reductive or unfair to say that Drew's take on Clinton is that of the Washington establishment: he is a great natural talent, but too eager to please, not tough or disciplined enough, too un-presidential, too indecisive and vacillating—"like a cork bobbing about on the waves." The wellsprings of these maladies are Arkansas unsophistication ("He had been a very big deal in a very small milieu"), the over-informality of his generation and, perhaps, some kind of

psychopathological need to ingratiate.

Clinton's talkiness grates on Drew. He seems to her to spend too much time before the public, to be too emotionally open; even the much-praised economic conference in November 1992 in her view took "precious time out of the transition." During the haggling over his first budget, he let members of Congress walk all over him: freshman Representative Eric Fingerhut (who just lost his seat) successfully demanded personal visits to his district from both Lloyd Bentsen and Laura Tyson as the price of his vote. Clinton changes his mind so easily that he emerged from the meeting in which he was supposed to be firing Les Aspin and asked aides, "Are we sure we're doing the right thing?" Drew's relief when a Washington insider such as Vernon Jordan or David Gergen steps in to set things aright is palpable, and she sympathetically records their supposedly discreet horror over the conduct of the presidency: "The Clinton White House was unlike any Gergen had known... within days he was feeling weary and frustrated." She plainly believes that Al Gore, a man of her subculture, would be a better president than Clinton. In some ways she even misses Ronald Reagan:

Clinton had a dreadful salute. Instead of the snappy ones that Reagan and Bush got off, Clinton's salute was limp, his raised hand curved.

Reagan knew how to look like what people thought a president should look like, conduct himself as people thought a president should (he deliberately threw back his shoulders before going onstage).

The main weakness of this view of Clinton is that, by so firmly locating the problem in his personality and character, it implies that all the presidency needs is a person who can deal with each week's Washington crisis more adeptly. As is more obvious since the 1994 elections than when Drew was writing, a great deal of Clinton's difficulty is political and has nothing to do with the way he supervises the White House. Clinton won only 43 percent of the vote in 1992. His views are fundamentally not those of most of the electorate. Drew recognizes this: "Clinton's problem was that he was a big-government, or, at least, an activist-government man trying to come across as a man who didn't believe in big government." Unfortunately, she doesn't elaborate or treat it as the essential problem.

In contrast to Drew, Greenberg is as obsessed with what fundamental principles Democratic presidents should seem to embody as he is elaborately uninterested in news events. What makes his book

interesting, in part, is knowing that you're seeing some of the concealed endoskeleton of the presidency, the strategic political calculation that must be in Clinton's mind as he manages each succeeding crisis but that he can never discuss openly.

According to Greenberg's account of himself, the erosion of the Democratic electoral base has been his primary concern at least since 1985, when he was called in by the Democratic leadership of Macomb County, Michigan, north of Detroit, where Walter Mondale had just gotten 32 percent of the vote. Macomb is a widely used synecdoche of the Reagan Democrat phenomenon. Catholic, white-ethnic, it is made up mainly of people who got from proletarian to middle class in one generation thanks to the United Auto Workers and the post-World War II economic boom. Macomb County has the highest rate of boat ownership in the country. Greenberg's charge was to find out why the county had gone from reliably Democratic to reliably Republican. For a member of the presidential entourage, he gives the main reason with amazing candor:

These white Democratic defectors expressed a profound distaste for black Americans, a sentiment that pervaded almost everything they thought about government and politics. Blacks constitute the explanation for their vulnerability and for almost everything that has gone wrong in their lives; not being black is what constitutes being middle class; not living with blacks is what makes a neighborhood a decent place to live.

The bulk of *Middle Class Dreams* is devoted to a Macomb's-eye history of the last hundred years' worth of presidential elections, in which the party that attracts the center of the income distribution always wins. Greenberg sees presidential politics as having been a pretty even struggle until the Democratic Party got itself enmeshed in the race issue. The Republicans, working their way down from a base among the affluent, have traditionally sold the idea that what's good for business is good for America, while the Democrats have tried to persuade the middle class that it needs new government initiatives.

Naturally the Depression, when business seemed to have failed utterly and the middle class was staring poverty in the face, was the triumphant period for the Democrats. But, Greenberg points out, almost as soon as times turned better (that is, in the 1940 presidential election), the Democrats became vulnerable to defections from Macomb-style Catholic suburban voters. Many of them left the party in the 1950s to vote against Adlai Stevenson, the candidate whom

NEW REPUBLIC readers of the day were swooning over. The Democrats' coup de grace came with Lyndon Johnson's wholehearted embrace of civil rights and other black political causes. As Greenberg says, "As late as 1960, voters found the parties indistinguishable on the race issue." (Martin Luther King Sr. endorsed Richard Nixon over John Kennedy for president.) But after about 1965, the Democrats were clearly identified as the black party, and this cost them both the South and Macomb-like areas abutting the black ghettos of the North.

Greenberg's analysis generally fits into the Silent Majority / Real America school, recalling the work of Kevin Phillips, Ben Wattenberg and Richard Scammon, E. J. Dionne, and Thomas and Mary Edsall, among others. What's noteworthy about him is the heavy emphasis he puts on race rather than cultural liberalism as the key problem for the Democratic Party—and, of course, his proximity to a president. For twenty years after the realigning election of 1968, the pollster most listened to by would-be Democratic presidents was Pat Caddell, with his dream of a new coalition built around the generational consciousness of baby-boomers. This idea now seems impossibly naïve; not only does Clinton listen to Greenberg, but any other conceivable serious Democratic presidential aspirant is likely to have a similarly middle-class-obsessed pollster. Macomb-think dominates the debate over the future of the party.

As Greenberg sees it, there is only one way for the Democrats to win presidential elections, and that is to tone down their identification with blacks while painting the Republicans as a rich man's party that doesn't care about ordinary working people. Macomb County, he says, subscribes to an extreme version of the social-science finding that the middle income quintile has gotten smaller. One participant in a focus group tells him: "They should be almost nonexistent [in the year 2000]. There should be either millionaires and the poor; there should be no in-between. There should be no middle class." This would seem to create a real opportunity for the Democrats, except that, as the race issue has gone national, a version of the process that C. Vann Woodward long ago identified as dominating Southern politics has set in: voters ripe for economic populism have been expertly decoyed by the political operatives of the rich into allowing their prejudices to override their interests.

Without quoting Woodward, Greenberg makes it clear that he is aware of this dynamic, but he believes, optimistically, that it can be short-circuited. He detects a

"cooling of the fires of racial politics"—which is at least theoretically plausible on the grounds that the black migration to the North and the attendant vast rearrangement of neighborhood patterns in cities such as Detroit are now comfortably in the past. Therefore economic issues could return to the fore, if (the eternal caveat of the political consultant) the right candidate could be found to voice them.

When Greenberg hooked up with Clinton, he must have felt that he had finally met the man who could make his dream of Democratic resurrection come true. From the very beginning of his political career Clinton has demonstrated an uncanny ability to run stronger in conservative districts than any other liberal could. Even as a long-haired law professor making his first race (Congress, 1974, unsuccessful), he carried four counties that had gone for George Wallace in 1968. Clinton's fortunes in his early statewide elections in Arkansas rose and fell on the basis of low-theoretical-content economic issues: he won the governorship in 1978 by opposing utility rate increases, and lost it in 1980 because he had instituted a \$25 auto license fee. "New politics" didn't have much to do with it.

Greenberg's conception of the Clinton presidential campaign in 1992 was so firmly rooted in his work in Macomb that he describes Clinton's 1991 announcement speech, in Little Rock, by saying, "Clinton spoke immediately and directly to the people of Macomb County." In 1992, when Clinton made the obligatory visit to Macomb Community College (host to seven presidential candidates since 1984), he explicitly asked his audience to trade in its racial concerns for economic ones, in keeping with the Greenberg script—saying "let's forget about race and be one nation again," in return for which "I'll help you build the middle class back."

For this to work, Greenberg had to be right that Macomb-style voters were ready to put the race issue behind them, and the Democrats had to convince these voters that they needed something from government, something that would help the middle class rather than the poor but that the Republicans wouldn't provide. Like what? For voters who feel that the middle class is threatened and that education is now the key to individual success, the best bet seemed to be what Clinton started to call "investing in people," the political slogan that emerged from the campaign's reading of Robert Reich's book *The Work of Nations*.

Just at the moment when this vision of trying to build a Democratic coalition

based on the middle class's desire for education and training (along with health care, of course) was emerging, Ross Perot's popularity was at its peak. Greenberg was spooked by Perot. Rather than seeing Perot as a second Republican candidate who would take votes away from George Bush, Greenberg decided that Clinton ought to demonstrate that he shared Perot's distaste for the federal deficit and the inefficiency of government. So Greenberg "had an epiphany." He seized upon the work of David Osborne and Ted Gaebler (*Reinventing Government*) as showing a way for Clinton to appeal to Perot voters:

Why not combine the anti-politics, re-inventing government message with the investment in people message?... Only Clinton had realized that these are not necessarily contradictory positions in a discourse with the American people.

It was a key juncture in more ways than one. Having previously rested his argument on the assumption that only an old-fashioned politics of economic interest could bring the Democrats back, Greenberg now abruptly moves onto the terrain of "themes." It is less stable ground, since these themes contain so many elisions and contradictions that they're likely to evanesce after Election Day. Greenberg's account of a post-epiphany meeting of the campaign's high command, on June 12, 1992, makes it clear that it was almost part of the program for Clinton *not* actually to carry out the policies he would be advocating:

The approach used Osborne to criticize an inefficient and out-of-touch bureaucratic government, while shunning the more arcane, even if sensible solutions, like increased choice and decentralization. The approach used Reich to put the economic focus on initiatives for people, while eschewing any propensity to big government spending programs.

Granted, Greenberg is only a pollster and his responsibility for the course of the presidency is necessarily limited; but this does at least make us understand that Clinton's waffling tendencies are rooted in practicalities as well as personal shortcomings. Like past elections in Clinton's career, the 1992 presidential race was built on a strategy that required him to modulate his self-presentation constantly and to attempt to avoid taking sides on divisive issues. His character flaws, in other words, were encouraged to flourish by the political circumstances. If, as Greenberg says hopefully, the Republican presidential majority of the 1968-1988 period was based on racial signaling that could win elections

but could not "renew the Republican Party and create an enduring majority," Clinton's presidential plurality had exactly the same quality. The signaling was economic, but it was just as untranslatable into action.

So it shouldn't be surprising that as president, Clinton has delivered on only half of the Greenberg plan. He has tried to deracialize social policy by never mentioning issues such as school integration and affirmative action, playing up his concern with crime and family values, and passing significant new programs that will disproportionately benefit blacks but can be billed as being for the middle class, such as national service and the beefed up Earned Income Tax Credit. On economics, however, he has tried to be an efficiency man and a populist at the same time, and he has won over nobody. He dropped the middle-class tax cut that was supposed to win over the Reagan Democrats and then re-embraced it after the 1994 elections; he didn't deliver on health care (precisely because his campaign promise simultaneously to expand coverage and cut costs couldn't be met); and he won't have much luck trying to sell himself in Macomb County next time around as the man responsible for keeping the economy from overheating.

To be fair to Clinton and Greenberg as politicians (though this is hardly encouraging), even in the great days of 1992 when Clinton could get away with trying to be all things to all people, George Bush still carried Macomb County: after all of Clinton's and Greenberg's enormous efforts to woo Macomb, running during a recession against an incumbent who wasn't a natural politician, Clinton got 37 percent of the Macomb vote, improving on Walter Mondale's performance by only 5 points. In the 1994 Michigan Senate race between Spencer Abraham, a Republican who had never run for office before, and Bob Carr, a popular Democratic representative, Macomb voted 61 percent Republican. The possibility has to be entertained that Macomb and places like it are now no longer Reagan Democratic, but simply Republican.

Greenberg, in material added to the book after the elections, takes the position that the 1994 results represent the apotheosis of the Perot voter, who pulled the Republican lever as a gesture "against the Congress, politics and big government," rather than against Clinton, or for the Republican Party and conservatism. Clinton's strange behavior since Election Day can in part be explained by saying that he is entertaining Greenberg-like thoughts again. He has dissociated himself from the Democratic Party's "nega-

tives" (e.g., Joycelyn Elders). He is wooing the Perot people by talking about eliminating this or that Cabinet department, and at the same time he is trying to win back the middle class with new government goodies like the tax cut and a college tuition deduction.

I just can't be brought around by Greenberg's theory about the future of Clinton and the Democrats, because the internal contradiction between the two overriding goals—less government, and more government help for the middle class—is so great as to create an unbearable tension when campaigning ends and governing begins. It's also possible that we haven't in fact put the politics of race behind us. If we had, then Newt Gingrich, who reads polls, too, probably wouldn't be talking about welfare, gangs, illegitimacy and other ghetto ills quite so much. But allowing Greenberg his premise that the Republicans can't ride the race issue forever, the Democrats would then have to position themselves either as the party of efficiency or the party of government services—not both.

Simply deciding isn't going to make it easy. In describing a series of focus groups he convened in Macomb County, Greenberg says, "not one Macomb participant in these discussions could identify any appreciable benefit from government spending, or more pointedly, from the government's handling of their tax dollars." In an area that has lots of senior citizens and defense contracts, this view is objectively a little nutty, but it also can be seen as a coded way of saying something like this: "We have realized since the Eisenhower administration that Republican presidents aren't going to take away government benefits (except those that go exclusively to Democratic voters, like the War on Poverty)—they just aren't going to add any new ones. At this point in our trajectory through the American social structure, that's fine with us: we think we have more to lose from new taxes than we have to gain from new programs."

Lyndon Johnson, who drove Macomb away from the Democrats, was no seminar-room Mondale or Dukakis: he delivered to blue-collar white ethnics a booming economy, a vast expansion of state universities, and the Medicare program, which was by far the biggest Great Society initiative, dwarfing the War on Poverty. And still they bolted. The Democratic Party can be seen as a victim of its own success. Most of the people it has helped to lift into the middle class have concluded, on arriving there, that they don't need the Democratic Party any more. (It's the ultimate luxury to be able to vote against someone like Jack Brooks or Dan Rostenkowski because you don't like the way

things are going in Washington: people voted *for* these men not for national-political reasons, but to get stuff.) Blacks, by the same token, are extremely Democratic today not because they don't know what's good for them, but because they feel the need for government to help them complete their entry into the middle class. Greenberg's tables of poll results from 1992 show that despite all the careful positioning, Clinton ran strongest among people feeling financial pressure and people to whom government tolerance "of different views and lifestyles" is of paramount importance—that is, among people who do want something new from government—and worst among people high in "middle-class consciousness."

How should the party overcome this? Greenberg, it seems to me, is plainly more right than Drew, whose idea is that Clinton should try to restore what she calls "the mystique of the office," because the presidency is "about more than getting things done." This doesn't sound like the stuff of which political realignments are made. Greenberg's view is also more persuasive than what might be called the Dave McCurdy theory, according to which the party should move to the center. Given what their base is, the Democrats aren't going to be able to ensure that no Elders-like figure ever gets an appointment again. The "center" is more complicated than it first looks anyway, comprising as it does both low-deficit, free-trade business interests and Macomb-style Catholics who come down on the opposite side from business on many issues. Simply engaging in mantra-like repetitions of center-valenced words such as "work," "values" and "opportunity" doesn't give people an affirmative reason to vote for you.

Without denying the difficulty of the project and the temptation of a stop-gap solution, the hard truth is that the weakest aspect of Greenberg's schema is the part about attracting Perot voters by promising to cut government. Clinton manifestly has no actual interest in shrinking government, so his sallies in that direction tend to be half-hearted and unconvincing. That the party as a whole can convince voters it is more anti-government than the Republicans is about as likely as the Republicans winning the gay and black votes. Instead, what the Democrats ought to do, even though it won't solve their immediate electoral problems, is present themselves as the party that helps people at the lower end of the Republican coalition to get through the great economic transition that is making them feel so angry and vulnerable. In particular, Clinton and Greenberg are right in their instinct that, since the great divide in

American society today is the line between high-school-educated and higher-educated people, the Democrats ought to be looking for ways to help voters (or their children) get across that line, into the territory where people are doing all right.

Just as voters are never going to trust Democrats to cut government, they also

aren't going to believe that Republicans will deliver significant new programs: they never have before. Why vitiate the party's strongest point by promising to cut government just as forcefully as you're promising to expand it? It only makes it easier for the Republicans to deride every new Democratic idea as big

and wasteful and bureaucratic if Clinton has set up anti-big-government as the highest good. For voters, it's only big government if it's for somebody else.

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Jed Perl on Art

Solitary in the City of Art

Two contemporary figure painters have to all intents and purposes chucked their surnames and given names in favor of singular, rather exotic appellations. Balthus is a childhood nickname that the young artist was urged to use professionally by no less an authority than his mother's friend Rilke. Kitaj is the name of the man whom the artist's mother married when the boy was 8 or 9, and although it is prefaced by the initials R.B., the Ronald that the "R" stands for is used so little as to be almost a secret. These are artists of different generations—Balthus is 86, Kitaj is 62—who were born and have lived in different places and whose work is in many respects as different as night and day. But I think there is a link between these two figure painters who've made big, singular reputations for themselves in a contemporary scene in which abstraction comes first, and their stand-alone names are not irrelevant to that link. At least this is how it seemed to me last summer in London, when the Kitaj retrospective that has just opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was at the Tate Gallery at the same time that the Lefevre Gallery was hosting a Balthus show, which consisted of a single new painting, an almost six-and-a-half-foot-high canvas of a blond-haired girl playing with a cat.

Balthus is painting very slowly these days, so the appearance of *The Cat with Mirror III*, the first work to come out of

his studio in five years, is an event. And what a painting it is, with its rainbow luxuriance of color harmonized and melted together by means of a magical chiaroscuro. There's a density to this painting that you will not find in anything in the Kitaj retrospective. In their

feverishness about Balthus and Kitaj that paradoxically links them all the way back to the nonconformist beginnings of the modern movement against which they're often said to be in revolt. The painters and writers who revere Balthus as a classicist in spite of his sometimes incendiary erotic subject matter may not countenance Kitaj, who is an idiosyncratic expressionist in spite of his obvious reverence for the modern canon. But for those who keep close tabs on what both painters are up to, Balthus and Kitaj can look like the true inheritors of early-twentieth-century revolution. The two artists paint paintings that poke holes in the modern pieties, and wherever and whenever they exhibit, polemics fly.

These artists are not easy to place: that's key to their appeal. They paint apparently popular subject matter—a blond girl in Balthus's *The Cat with Mirror III*; a street scene in Kitaj's *Cecil Court* (1983-84), the

dazzling mélange of figures that was plastered all over London's Underground last summer on the posters advertising the Tate show. Yet Balthus and Kitaj have such insistently personal ideas about how a painting ought to be put together that they transform the bare realist facts into enveloping formal puzzles, so that reality itself begins to seem somehow abstract. Their work



CECIL COURT, LONDON WC2 (THE REFUGEES) (1983-84), BY R.B. KITAJ

Courtesy Tate Gallery

intentions and ambitions, however, Balthus and Kitaj are interestingly complementary figures. The realist-in-an-age-of-abstraction equation doesn't even begin to describe the unusualness of their situations. True, these artists often appeal to people who are dissatisfied with the more reduced forms of classic abstract art. But there's a nonconformism and an art-for-art's-sake

leaves the old debates about abstraction versus representation where they ought to be, which is in tatters. With the triumph of abstraction, which brought the evolution of Western art toward ever greater verisimilitude to such a startling conclusion, the possibility opened up of beginning all over again, with realism as just a choice among choices. In the work of Balthus and Kitaj, who have made that choice, it becomes clear that the essential polarity in twentieth-century art isn't between realism and abstraction, it is between the private and the public—between the extent to which an artist invents a private language and the extent to which an artist makes use of forms and structures that are already widely understood.

Kitaj, who wrote much of the text for the catalogue of his retrospective, has been extremely forthcoming about how it feels to live at a time when, as far as art is concerned, anything goes. He has a conversational prose style that's slangy, erudite and bold, and sometimes recalls the writing of an earlier idiosyncratic American mythmaker, Edward Dahlberg. Although Kitaj's insistence on explaining himself to his audience is rather unusual for an artist, I don't think that he's mistaken in believing that an artist who goes his own way will do well to blow his own horn. By now twentieth-century art is such a maze of depersonalized "isms" that an artist has to insist on exactly how he does or does not fit in.

Could it be that even Balthus, who has for most of his sixty-odd-year career taken the position that the work should speak for itself, is beginning to suspect that those who remain silent are condemned to being misunderstood? In recent years Balthus has encouraged his literary friends, who were once instructed not even to mention the date of his birth, to examine the ins and outs of his biography. And he has himself been doing something he never did—granting interviews. The most extensive of these, published in the English quarterly *Modern Painters* this past fall, is a conversation that Balthus had over the course of an afternoon with the rock star David Bowie (who is a serious collector of contemporary English art and has lately begun to show his own paintings). It's an essential addition to the Balthus archives, a great old painter's most sustained effort to tell us what he believes.

When Balthus and Kitaj speak out, they present contemporary variations on a theme that goes all the way back to Baudelaire. They believe that in order to know himself, the artist must know

his public. And they believe that if the artist's imagination is powerful enough it can goad, skewer, refute, ignore, correct, and in rare instances even transform public perception. Balthus and Kitaj take this complex relationship with the public in very different directions. In the *Modern Painters* interview, Balthus observes that "probably . . . what people hate so much in my work is harmony. Everything is so contrary to harmony today." If you examine this statement for a moment, you realize that here we have our preeminent figure painter stating that the reality that he presents in his paintings is a reality that contradicts the facts of life. Kitaj can sound, on the other hand, like an eccentric populist when he sets out his ideas. He has written that his paintings are "pictures of an imperiled world you may know only as imperfectly as I do, if at all." In Kitaj's writing, the line between what's within the studio and what's beyond the studio is never very clearly drawn. He argues against the ivory tower by suggesting that public experience is a magnification of private experience. Yet in his own roundabout way he arrives at an attitude that is, as much as Balthus's magisterial isolation, a version of the Baudelairean stance—the artist is forever ruminating on his troubled relationship with the public.

The typical Balthus painting is of a person alone—the solitary girl in the barely furnished room. The typical Kitaj is a crowd scene. But Kitaj has also painted retreats. There are some paintings of deserted interiors that appear to be about loneliness, although that can only be a part of it, since they commemorate the scenes of Kitaj's earliest sexual encounters. And Balthus has painted street scenes full of strangers who, unbeknownst to one another, are taking their places in what amount to surreal urban pantomimes. One of the preeminent images of modern public life comes from Balthus, who completed his final salute to the Parisian streets, *The Passage du Commerce Saint-André* in 1954, just before he moved his studio from the city that formed him as an artist. Kitaj saw the *Passage* at the Balthus retrospective in 1983 in Paris, and it inspired what is certainly his best painting so far, the phantasmagoria on the subject of London street life with the meandering title, *Cecil Court, London WC2 (The Refugees)*.

Cecil Court is a real place—a teensy street of antiquarian bookshops just off Charing Cross Road—but the theme of Kitaj's painting, which is the city as a theater in which we act out our lives, will be familiar to anybody who has lived in a great metropolis. Kitaj—who was born in

Cleveland, Ohio, and grew up there and in Troy, New York—has become a connoisseur of cities: New York, Paris, Amsterdam, Los Angeles and of course London, which has been home base for more than thirty years. *Cecil Court* is about the London phase of Kitaj's life, but it is also about the inside-outside status of an artist who keeps his own counsel amid the crazy circus of the world. The schematic perspective and bright coloring that Kitaj uses in *Cecil Court* recall a Victorian toy theater, and through this mad-cap setting, all billboard colors and acid-etched line, rush a cast of characters that define London's heterogeneity. They include a bald old man grasping a nosegay, a doll-like pair of kids, a young woman who, legs ajar, throws herself at the world. These men and women are memorable in the way that people whom we catch sight of in the street can be memorable: we comprehend a personality in a glance. Yet each of Kitaj's figures is absorbed in some private reverie, and they are all apparently oblivious to the artist, who reclines in the midst of this urban maelstrom on a chrome Le Corbusier lounge chair, a book at his side and another object, which may well be a book, in his hand.

So far as I know, Kitaj's *Cecil Court* and Balthus's *Passage* have never hung in the same room, but they would make an interesting pair. Kitaj is basically doing a variation on Balthus's absorbing theme, except that the street life that is depressive in the Paris painting becomes manic in the London painting. Where the mood of *The Passage du Commerce Saint-André* is misty and grayed-down and quite discreet, *Cecil Court*, painted thirty years later, is hard-edged and bright. Balthus, the evening's baguette in his right hand as he walks away from us, is forever retreating from the twilit scene that he has imagined. Kitaj, reclining in the midst of everything in *Cecil Court*, is the lead player who does not—or prefers not to—fit in. Kitaj, an American living in London, paints paintings that give the London streets an American vehemence. Balthus, although born in Paris, has spent more of his life in Italy and Switzerland (where he lived as a child, passed some of World War II and has now settled down), and his imagination is perhaps more at home in the Rome or Siena or Kyoto of art history than in the Paris of fact. Both artists have gone in their own directions—they're solitaires in the crowded city of art.

Cecil Court comes near the midpoint of Kitaj's 115-piece retrospective. It is the painting to which everything that we have seen before seems to lead, and

it is the measure against which every work that comes after, including such interesting recent paintings as *In The Sea* and *The Wedding*, must be judged. The period of *Cecil Court* and another first-rate painting, the recollection of an American boyhood that is called *Baseball*, is Kitaj's most fertile phase; these works are both dated 1983-84. But I'm not sure how much people will be able to focus on them, within the context of the show, because like most retrospectives that are mounted these days, the Kitaj show is way too big. A dozen paintings and three dozen drawings would have given a far better sense of what Kitaj can do.

As it is, the drawings get a little bit lost, and that's a shame, because they are among Kitaj's finest inventions. Kitaj's way with a pencil or a stick of charcoal or pastel is absolutely intuitive: drawings that catch the eye this easily can't be willed into existence. Kitaj draws in a naturalistic and at times even journalistic vein that owes something to Degas and something to Lautrec; he uses elegant knife-edge linear effects to create close-up views of the people he knows and loves, and the end product is a casually encyclopedic contemporary portrait gallery. The studies of public figures who also happen to be good friends, such as Isaiah Berlin and Philip Roth, show an easy, idiomatic grasp of the way that a face unlocks a personality. Kitaj draws Quentin Crisp using a mix of charcoal and muted pastel that is one of his most successful chromatic conceptions; the result is a stunning expressionist image, terrifying and appealing. The studio nudes, both female and male, exude a physical self-confidence that gives us Kitaj's definition of grown-up erotic experience. Who else has done male nudes that convey a man's sense of sexual power? There are also extraordinary drawings of Kitaj's family—his grandmother, mother, daughter and son. The drawing of his son Lem reading a book is among the very best—exact yet meltingly romantic.

When an artist draws from life, he wants to give an imaginative dimension to actual things. Kitaj is by now an old hand at this kind of transformation, yet when he turns from drawing to painting he often seems to have no compass to guide him. As a draughtsman, Kitaj uses nature to discipline his imagination. As a painter, he has an imagination that is larger than life, so much so that there are rooms in the retrospective where nothing that he imagines is plainly, simply alive as art. He turns his intellectual gifts into hyperbolic effects. He wants everything from his figures: he means

them to hold together complicated allegories involving themes such as memory and obsession, which I can't help concluding must be painting-proof. In *Against Slander* (1990-91) he paints a city full of gossips; in *Women and Men* (1991-93) a battle is brewing between the sexes; *Greenwich Village* (1990-93) is a landscape of memory. The ideas are thrillingly serious, but a lot of these paintings are just silly-putty spaces. Foreground and background, left and right, up and down slide into one another with a casual willfulness that forecloses any possibility that the canvas can cohere. *Cecil Court* and *Baseball* are fluid dream-spaces that somehow simultaneously respect an idea of spatial and temporal unity. *Greenwich Village* may follow a dream logic, but it does not make pictorial sense, and that is the only kind of sense that ever really matters in painting.

Kitaj's fascination as an artist has to do with his way of pulling disparate ideas and inspirations together into an insouciant scrapbook style. There is no question but that he gives new panache to a collage-soaked sensibility that runs through classic modernism and includes Ezra Pound's poetry and Max Beckmann's triptychs. I salute Kitaj's intellectual nerviness. Who else would even imagine it possible to paint the atmosphere of Walter Benjamin's life, the times of Walter Lippmann, Talmudic concepts, a scene from the life of Henry Adams, the details of one's earliest sexual encounters? Kitaj has dared to go where none with his sophistication has gone before. Yet there are just too many paintings in which Kitaj is letting the pieces fall as they may and then plugging up the compositional cracks with blocks of bright, flat color. He tolerates far too many grating, stop-and-start effects.

Disjuncture, which is key to Kitaj's work, is a method that he has adapted from the copybook of abstraction. Disjuncture once brought fresh drama into art by challenging the idea that a painting represents a single slice of time and space. But today abstraction is all too often a virtually academic enterprise, dedicated to preserving some small trove of painting's possibilities, and Kitaj's very craziness has a strong dose of the formulaic. Still, it is Kitaj's way of using the Cubist-derived idea of disjuncture to rehabilitate older forms of storytelling that has endeared him to many of today's unconventional realists, who say that they want to bring narrative back into art. If you like Kitaj—or the idea of Kitaj—it is going to be because he has so many stories to tell. Yet last

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summer in London, when the only painting that Balthus has finished in the past five years was hanging across town from the Kitaj retrospective, each exhibition was in its own way a stark reminder of how problematic narrative is today. Balthus had rejected exactly the kind of complex narratives at which his fans most desperately wanted him to succeed. And Kitaj, with 1,001 stories to tell about our overpopulated world, was in the midst of a project that no living artist could possibly bring to completion.

In the *Modern Painters* interview, Balthus sounds both cheerful and austere, a latter-day philosophe ensconced in a Swiss "retirement" from which he's pleased to contemplate his turbulent past in Paris and Rome. Balthus is perfectly aware of what is going on around him and of the contemporary appeal of Kitaj's overload of images. Yet he has no complaints. Sometimes he simply turns aside a line of questioning, and a few of those silences tell us everything that we need to know. Listen carefully to Balthus on the subject of subject matter; after all, his sexually explicit imagery was controversial long before Robert Mapplethorpe was born. "The subject has no importance," Balthus says. "The subject for me is always a pretext to make a painting." This is not an evasion but a considered high modernist position. Balthus wants both the provocateurs and the prudes to know that they're missing the point.

What, then, is the point? I think that according to Balthus it is that the real story is the story of the making of the painting. Balthus is, after his own fashion, a formalist, but he hastens to distance himself from what he sees as the solipsistic situation of the artist who is "obsessed by painting." What Balthus believes is missing in much modern painting is "tension ... a sort of no repose." As far as his own practice is concerned, he finds the needed tension not in his subject matter but in the very process of looking—"looking at a chair, looking at a cup of tea, or any object at all." The looking out is also a looking in, for the truth is that much of the appar-

ently naturalistic material in Balthus's paintings has been dreamed up in the studio. There's an almost metaphysical dimension to perception. As Balthus explains it, even "when I paint something after nature, I'm always recognizing something in myself."

Balthus's rejection of the question of subject matter—although probably to some degree strategic, a jibe at the Balthusians who think that there's nothing else—contrasts dramatically with Kitaj's manic cultivation of a dozen subjects at once. And yet even Kitaj cannot escape the essential fact of modern art, which is that the way that a painting is

thing, Balthus takes his rightful place among the great simplifiers. "I'm considering myself as a craftsman," he says. "I don't want to be an artist. I have a horror of the word."

Since completing the melancholy *Passage du Commerce Saint-André* in 1954, Balthus has become an increasingly inward-turning painter. He has put no more than two figures in a painting in the past twenty-eight years; mostly he paints one figure at a time. The raw materials that go into his paintings don't vary that much. There are the juxtaposed planes of floor and wall and furniture, the curves of the model's body, the angle of

the light. But through subtle shifts in the way that he carpenters together these essential elements he now seems to be able to make just about anything happen. He's a master craftsman who works unhurriedly, deliberately: the authenticity of the product is guaranteed by the austerity of the process. Balthus has become as much of a back-to-basics artist as Mondrian. I think that it is Balthus's insistence on simplicity that frequently dismays those who look to his work for what Mondrian does not give them. And those who find something wanting in the figure paintings of Balthus may well end up being happier with the work of Kitaj, who keeps knocking together memorably crazy whatnots out of



THE CAT WITH MIRROR III (1989-94). BY BALTHUS

Courtesy The Lefevre Gallery

made, once a matter of behind-the-scenes magic, is now the key to a viewer's heart and mind. It doesn't matter whether the painting is more or less abstract, more or less realist. Since reality is no longer a given, everything is a gamble. If Kitaj is an extreme case of the tendency of modern art to mirror a world that many people believe has gone all to pieces, Balthus is our most triumphant current example of an artist who knows how to put it all back together. In the *Modern Painters* interview he says that he is "always tapping the same nail. I think what I have kept in a certain way, is my vision as a child. That sort of surprise in front of things." With this parable of a child banging a first nail into a first piece of wood who turns into an old man who's doing exactly the same

all kinds of found materials.

In London I heard it said that Balthus's new canvas was perfect but somehow not satisfying. Balthus has answered this complaint in the *Modern Painters* interview, in which he observes that if people look to his paintings for the disharmony that they know in life they will be disappointed. He says that people are "shrinking back from beauty. ... If you speak of beauty, you are at once suspected of ... kitsch."

When David Bowie asks Balthus which of his paintings he likes the best, he answers as many artists do, by talking about his recent work. I agree with Balthus when he says that the new *Cat with Mirror* is one of the finest things he has ever done. It's a painting that unites the Biedermeier solidity of

the compositions that first made Balthus famous in the 1930s with the overripe color that was enchanting him in the 1950s: that is its particular kind of harmony. Here the old Balthusian erotic charge has cooled to an androgynous tingle. The young girl, dressed in contemporary tunic and leggings that look a lot like a medieval costume, might easily be mistaken for an extremely handsome young prince. The painting offers a distant, philosophical view of

beauty. The key to everything is the extraordinary scale of the work. It is intimate yet monumental, and that union-of-opposites leaves us with a feeling of almost preternatural calm. There is a story to be read in this densely worked yet utterly spontaneous canvas, and it is a very simple one. Balthus began to paint a fairy-tale princess, he worked for five long years, and when he was finished the princess had been granted eternal life. •

Wise Guy

BY CHRISTOPHER BENFEY

One Train by Kenneth Koch

(Knopf, 74 pp., \$20)

On the Great Atlantic Rainway: Selected Poems 1950-1988 by Kenneth Koch

(Knopf, 324 pp., \$25)

One fall evening in San Francisco, or so the story goes, Randall Jarrell met with Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs on Fisherman's Wharf. The year was 1956. Burroughs, in a belligerent mood, challenged Jarrell to demonstrate "excellence" in poetry. Jarrell (forced here to front for the East Coast literary establishment) dutifully responded by reading aloud Robert Frost's devastating portrait of a bad marriage, "Home Burial." Ginsberg leaped up in mid-recital, shouting, "Coupla quares yakking!"

Alongside the Beat poetry of the '50s, another hip and spontaneous body of poetry developed, with closer ties to the New American painting than to the Beat poetry that inspired Jack Kerouac's poetic choruses and Ginsberg's *Howl*. Equally resistant to the academic poetry of Jarrell and his confreres ("the poetry/Written by the men with their eyes on the myth/And the Missus and the mid-terms," Kenneth Koch wrote in 1956), the so-called New York School assembled its own outsider identity from some of the same sources as the Beats: an urban tale savvy, sometimes inflected with Jewish and gay sensibilities, and an openness to avant-garde work in other media.

What most clearly distinguished the poets from the New York School poets

was probably the issue of class. The New York poets—several of whom attended Harvard—frequented art galleries (Frank O'Hara, James Schuyler and John Ashbery), ballet studios (Edwin Denby) and other provinces of the elite. The Beats aspired to a more proletarian, outlaw ethos. They might have strong opinions about Charlie Parker, but they'd draw a blank at the mention of Balanchine.

Kenneth Koch has been a conspicuous member of the New York School, often chronicling its exploits and mourning its losses in his poetry. ("John Ashbery Jane Freilicher Larry Rivers Frank O'Hara / Their names alone bring tears to my eyes," he writes in one poem.) In fact, Koch may be credited with founding the school, since it was he who invited his Harvard classmate John Ashbery to come to New York, in the summer of 1949, and stay in his loft on Third Avenue at Sixteenth Street. "Overhead the El went crashing by," Ashbery recalled; "I later found that one of Kenneth's distractions was to don a rubber gorilla mask and gaze out his window at the passing trains."

While Koch's exuberant poetry has been influential and popular, he may be equally well known for his books about teaching children how to write poems—*Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* and *Rose, Where*

Did You Get That Red?—in which he shows a Wordsworthian faith in the childhood springs of poetry. "Children have a natural talent for writing poetry and anyone who teaches them should know that," Koch claims; teaching children to write is just a matter of getting them "tuned in to their own strong feelings, to their spontaneity, their sensitivity and their carefree inventiveness." These childhood virtues—spontaneity, carefree inventiveness and the rest—are obviously aims of Koch's own poetry. I admit that such a view of poetry as "natural" makes me nervous. It smacks too much of criticism often leveled at abstract art: "My kid could paint that!"

Actually the New York School moniker is misleading for Koch and company, since they had much less to do with the "heroic" figures of Abstract Expressionism—Pollock, De Kooning (two of whose paintings are on the covers of these new volumes), Rothko and the rest—than with younger practitioners of the "slightly rumpled realism" that Ashbery ascribes to such painters as Larry Rivers and Jane Freilicher. Rivers's taste for parody, Freilicher's willingness to include (I'm quoting Ashbery again) "a cat copied from Gainsborough in an otherwise straightforward inventory of the studio's contents on a particular day," find counterparts in the deliberately unlyrical experiments that Koch and Ashbery pursued together during the early '50s, and for years afterward.

In his new book, *One Train*, Koch looks back (as he often does in his poetry) to that fruitful period with Ashbery:

He is not writing much this year but he
likes to collaborate
So do I we do a set of sestinas at a speedy
rate
Six sestinas each about an animal with one
concluding one called The Bestiary
There is also a three-page poem in which
all the lines rhyme with the title
The Cassowary
Next we do a poetic compendium called
The New York Times
September Eighth Nineteen Fifty-One
both with and without rhymes
Our poems are like tracks setting out
We have little idea where we're going
or what it's about

Such poetry radiates spontaneity, but it's a very studied performance. The line with its unpunctuated caesurae ("I'm excited I'm writing at my typewriter it doesn't make too much sense") is borrowed from Apollinaire, as is the title "The Bestiary." Late in "A Time Zone," Koch quotes Apollinaire's most famous poem: "And under the Mirabeau Bridge

flows the Seine." Koch wants to anchor this poem in a particular French mood of the early twentieth century—neo-romantic, gently longing, funny-sad: "The style is laughter the subject may be a cause for tears."

Laughter is what Koch is after in many of his best-known poems. (Grinning and crinkly-eyed, he seems to promise such in the jacket photograph, taken by Larry Rivers.) His comic sense partakes of that same neo-romantic mood, and sometimes verges on the sentimental. Consider his influential poem "Thank You," the premise of which is that the poet turns down a list of dubious job offers:

Oh thank you for giving me the chance
Of being ship's doctor! I am sorry that
I shall have to refuse—
But, you see, the most I know of medicine
is orange flowers
Tilted in the evening light against a
cashmere red
Inside which breasts invent the laws of light
And of night, where cashmere moors itself
across the sea.

The terms of the rejection are always the same: the poet declines the practical and prosaic task in favor of the poetic and dreamy and sexy work of the imagination. How about a job advertising a

book on cutting down trees? "I like trees better / In their standing condition, when they sway at the beginning of evening..."

Koch is funnier when he's mad (as he is at the horde of academic poets he's always attacking), or when he's just poking fun at the pieties of modern poetry. His four "Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams" make mincemeat of Williams's famous apology for eating the plums in the icebox ("I have eaten / the plums / that were in / the icebox // and which / you were probably / saving / for breakfast / Forgive me / they were delicious / so sweet / and so cold"). Here are the first two sections:

I chopped down the house that you had
been saving to live in next summer.
I am sorry, but it was morning, and I had
nothing to do
and its wooden beams were so inviting.

We laughed at the hollyhocks together
and then I sprayed them with lye.
Forgive me. I simply do not know what
I am doing.

In a note, Koch calls this "an homage to a certain wildness and sensuousness in Williams's work." Maybe. But his parody of Frost's "Mending Wall" (with a few jabs at "Death of the Hired Man") isn't an homage to anything:

"Hiram, I think the sump is
backing up.
The bathroom floor boards
for above two weeks
Have seemed soaked
through. A little bird,
I think
Has wandered in the pipes,
and all's gone wrong."
"Something there is that
doesn't hump a sump"...

Koch shares with Ashbery a pervasive irony, an urban restlessness about the well-made lyric poem, à la Frost. ("Oh what worms they are!" he says of academic poets. "They wish to perfect their form.") For him rhyme and meter can only be used in an amused, offhand, can-you-believe-I'm-rhyming way. "Farewell, stale pale skunky pentameters," he writes in one poem, and in another, circa 1975: "... meter is probably, and rhyme too, probably, dead / For a while, except in narrative stanzas."

John Cage rejected harmony because he wasn't any good at it, or so he claimed, but Koch is such a gifted rhymster that one wishes he

did more of it, in lyric as well as narrative forms. His skills are on display in an amusing new translation of Ovid's narrative of Io ("The King of Gods espying her, in her bodacious tresses, / Desired for to fuck with her beside the water cresses."). Koch's parodic, tongue-in-cheek rhyming has obvious analogies with the cavalier treatment of figurative (the "slightly rumpled realism") in Larry Rivers's work.

Given all Koch's subversive tendencies, it's surprising that the didactic mode is such a major part of his poetry. Of course, Koch is a teacher—he has taught for decades at Columbia—who has given a lot of thought to teaching. But there's more to it. He is, in some of his most distinctive poems, an essayist in verse. There's something positively eighteenth-century about his whole way of writing: dispensing advice mulling over subjects like "The Art of Love" and "The Art of Poetry." Even his recurring subject of friendship is an eighteenth-century fixation (as in his advice, in "The Art of Poetry," to have friends who write as well as you do "These friends should supply such competition as will make you, at times, very uncomfortable."). His temperament—smiling, optimistic, gently parodic, with a sharp edge—is more reminiscent of Pope or Voltaire than of his outlaw heroes Byron and Rimbaud.

Koch's appealing new book of poems *One Train*, continues this Augustan trend. The title poem, "One Train May Hide Another," is a meditation on the theme posed by a "sign at a railroad crossing in Kenya." The structure of the poem is that of the list, a favorite strategy of the New York School. But there's something moralizing and advice-giving about much of the poem:

In a poem, one line may hide another line,
As at a crossing, one train may hide
another train.
That is, if you are waiting to cross
The tracks, wait to do it for one moment at
Least after the first train is gone. And so
when you read
Wait until you have read the next line—
Then it is safe to go on reading.
In a family one sister may conceal another,
So, when you are courting, it's best to have
them all in view...

Equally didactic are the sections—another list—of "A New Guide," each of which contains an injunction to look at something in the process of change.

Look at the clouds.
They may be what I look at most of all
Without seeing anything.
It may be that many other things are the
same way
But with clouds it's obvious.

The Book of Matches

Because I could not stay with you forever
The book of matches each red tip a year
Of marriage flared in the untidy cellar

Next to a bag of gift-wrapping ribbon
And paper which made a restless dragon
Breathing fire, licking the floor joists,

Burning craters, fountains of jagged fire
Up through the living room where the piano
Moaned in a crescendo of broken strings.

Flames climbed a ladderbacked chair, lit
Greedy on books, speed-reading the legend
Of our years together, disdaining the hearth,

Attacking the constancy of a staircase
We climbed one after the other hand in hand
Long after the children had gone to sleep.

Because I could not hold you long enough
The fire wrapped our bed in a cruel curtain
Where our bodies once shone making love

And at last it burst into the children's room
Furious to find them gone, no longer children
Any more than we are bride and groom.

DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN

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The motorboat runs through the sky
reflected in the river.
Look at the long trail of clouds behind.

That's an unusually lyric passage for Koch, with its echoes of Whitman; yet it exemplifies his favorite mode, the hortatory. The final section of the book is a long series of short poems with the thoroughly eighteenth-century title "On Aesthetics." Here's Koch's admonition titled "Aesthetics of Obituary": "To avoid the clichés / Of the obituary writers, / Die in obscurity. / A fine bed in a light-filled room / Someone who adores you is at your side / And vowed to silence."

Koch seems to have such a good time writing poetry that any carping feels like party-pooing. Still, I'll risk two complaints. First, his poems are usually too long. Lists tend to lack obvious closure; that's what makes them lists. Koch's lists go on and on, for page after page. "One Train May Hide Another," the best of the new poems, is admirably tight, despite the list structure. An earlier poem such as "Sleeping with Women" (of 1969) begins well—"Caruso: a voice. / Naples: sleeping with women."—but soon devolves into geographical lists ("Sleeping with women: in Greece, in China, in Italy...") and Steinian verbal association ("A door of pine, a stormfilled valentine asleep and sleeping with them / 'This Sunday heart of mine' profoundly dormoozed with them...").

My other complaint is harder to define, though it follows from that jaunty, sleeping-with-women persona. (Not for nothing that Koch's favorite stanza is Byron's from *Don Juan*.) There's a self-congratulatory aspect to much of Koch's poetry. In his mode of advice-dispenser, he presents himself as a sort of master of the good life. Koch's liberationist ethos fit the '60s, but poems such as *The Art of Love* haven't aged well. (Or maybe the subject hasn't.) Even the carefully culled excerpts in *On the Great Atlantic Rainway* fall a bit flat, like the "Ten things an older man must never say to a younger woman," including numbers three, "How many fingers are you holding up?" and five, "Take my pulse."

The comic and the didactic coexist uneasily in Koch's poetry. On subjects about which he speaks with authority (such as his wise and useful "Art of Poetry"), one doesn't mind the horsing around. And when he's really funny, as in the Frost parody, one doesn't mind the implied message. In his very best work ("Thank You," for example, and "One Train"), the hortatory is deflected or under wraps.

Too many poems, though, leave one

feeling not quite amused enough, or insufficiently instructed. Koch's lessons on the good life depend on easy targets: academic poets (whom he never names), repressed lovers, the dull and the square. If you share his prejudices (and about Frost and his followers, and the possibility of serious formalist poetry, I don't), you

may find his poems as funny as he does. But in his mixed mode of pontificating jester, Koch himself is ripe for parody.

CHRISTOPHER BENFEY teaches at Mount Holyoke College and is writing a book about Degas, Reconstruction and New Orleans.

Kitsch of Death

BY JAMEY GAMBRELL

The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond by Boris Groys translated by Charles Rougle

(Princeton University Press, 126 pp., \$24.95)

When Khrushchev's thaw brought the Russian avant-garde of the 1910s and '20s to the attention of the American public, very little was known about its history here. So dense was the haze of myth surrounding the period that Russian avant-gardism became a kind of Rorschach test designed to yield an ideological portrait of its American audience. The radical reductiveness of Russian abstract painting was alluring to American formalists; the work was unabashedly two-dimensional, the material contingency of the picture plane bared to its rationalistic bone. For those who had abandoned figurative art but were beginning to find Greenbergian formalism slim spiritual pickings, all those crosses and geometric figures in Malevich and company suggested a meta-language of mystical revelation.

To a left-oriented American art elite traumatized by both the anti-Communist hysteria of the McCarthy period and the exposés of Khrushchev's secret speech, the art of the October Revolution looked like redemption. Here was art invested with a social mission that elevated it above aesthetic hedonism; and it was not Socialist Realism, which had long been rejected by progressive intellectuals as regressive kitsch. The Russian avant-garde provided the ideal image of a progressive art: modernist, non-narrative, internationalist, allied with socialism.

Persecution by the party, moreover, made the Russians tragic heroes in all Western eyes. Even old-fashioned anti-Communists, who preferred art that their 5-year-olds couldn't draw and considered modernism politically suspect,

could champion the Russian avant-garde: the USSR's attacks on "modern art" were a blatant suppression of artistic freedom, and thus confirmed the evil of Bolshevism. (This explains, in part, why a conservative American government touted Abstract Expressionism in USIA-organized exhibitions around the world.) For the left, on the other hand, the Russian avant-garde's modernist aesthetic proved that Lenin's revolution had been on the right track, and that it was distorted in the late '20s and '30s by Socialist Realist kitsch and Stalinism.

Since then, the avant-garde's reputation and prices have soared, historians have filled in many blanks, and the storerooms of former Soviet museums have been opened. But the knottiest issues of the period are just beginning to be sorted out. They revolve around the death of the avant-garde and the birth of Socialist Realism. What happened and why? Boris Groys's slim volume—a polemical genesis, exegesis and post-scriptum on Stalinist culture—proposes an answer that seems calculated to raise the hackles of both the left and right wings of the art historical establishment.

In a nutshell, Groys's argument is that the utopian aspirations of the Russian avant-garde found their fullest and most genuine expression in Stalinist Socialist Realism. On the surface—certainly looking at the art work—this seems implausible, if not outrageous. In what sense could the brilliant, vibrant designs of Rodchenko and El Lissitzky the abstract canvases of Malevich and Popova, be akin to the moribund aesthetics of Socialist Realism? How could

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the two be spiritual twins when the proponents of Socialist Realism relentlessly persecuted the avant-garde as a remnant of "bourgeois formalism"? How to explain what we have come to see as the political martyrdom of the avant-garde?

The answer, needless to say, does not lie in stylistic similarities. Groys is not concerned with external appearance, but with ideological lineage and conceptual analogy. The goal of the avant-garde, as he sees it, was demiurgic: to put an end to the historical "progress" of traditional culture (to "cast Pushkin overboard from the steamship of modernity" as the Futurists demanded) and to impose a new, total environment of its own making, an ambition which allied it with the Revolution. The avant-garde proclaimed the death of art as an individualistic, autonomous pursuit and its replacement by the manipulations of artist-constructors who would contribute to fashioning the New Society and the New Soviet Person. Everything from art schools to the workplace, clothes and dishes had to be transformed. Art was no longer to occupy a discrete position within a varied social discourse, it was to actively reorganize the larger sociopolitical space according to its own exclusive plan. The movement of "art into life" was thus an expression of a will to power, part of a totalizing impulse with a long history in Russia.

The avant-garde did not attain this goal, despite its early cooperation with the Bolshevik regime. Still, Groys argues, by demanding the liquidation of its opponents in the name of "aesthetic dictatorship" (to parallel "proletarian dictatorship"), and by politicizing not only artistic debate but each artistic gesture, the avant-garde laid the theoretical foundation for Socialist Realism. Socialist Realism, in his view, simply radicalized the avant-garde's utilitarian conception of art and the role of the artist. While the aesthetic means differed considerably, the ends were the same. Generically realistic paintings of workers and peasants in factories and fields, all joyously fulfilling the plan, or of Politburo members benevolently directing the affairs of state, proved even more effective in creating the New Soviet Person. The artist-creator became an "engineer of the soul," and Stalin the chief artist of the new world. In 1932 Stalin abolished all artistic groupings. From then on, all works of art would have only one content, an a priori content, from which their originality and their novelty would derive: the party line. By that time, the avant-garde's ambitions had elicited a kind of deadly

sibling rivalry in the party. "There would have been no need to suppress the avant-garde," writes Groys, "if its black squares and transrational poetry had confined themselves to artistic space, but the fact that it was persecuted indicates that it was operating on the same territory as the state."

Socialist Realism, Groys argues, was not a "regression" to a representational style; nor was it carried out to satisfy the "tastes of the masses" or their leaders, as is commonly thought in the West. ("Whatever else the 1930s and 1940s in the Soviet Union may have been ... they were not a time in which the actual tastes of the people were allowed free and uninhibited expression.") Rather, it was a unique, original art—a kind of proto-postmodernism, quite different in intent, of course, but far more radical in its disregard for historical and hierarchical boundaries, than anything dreamed of in the 1980s. History was reduced to the struggle between "progressive" and "reactionary" forces, to hagiographies and demonologies in which "no distinction [was made] between Goethe and Sholokhov and Omar Khayyam—they all loved the people, were persecuted by scheming reactionary forces, labored for the radiant future, created truly realistic art, and so on." The party did not have to rail against the classics; it simply imposed its own reading on them. The past, it turned out, did not need to be literally destroyed as the avant-garde claimed—it could simply be dehistoricized. Whatever was not useful to the party could be ignored. And who could argue? The power of the state, enforced through terror, was the guarantor of Socialist Realism's "historical truth."

Groys suggests that one of the avant-garde's biggest failings, from the point of view of a regime increasingly focused around the Stalin personality cult, was that it removed the author from the picture by turning him into an anonymous engineer. It left no place for Stalin, who was the author *extraordinaire* of the party and the State. Thus Socialist Realism discarded the avant-garde's formal program, but it mythologized and incorporated the central gesture—casting out history in order to create a new world—of the avant-garde movement as a whole. The positive heroes and the evil "wreckers" (i.e., Lenin and Trotsky) of the Stalinist terror, both equally depersonalized and possessed of magical, inhuman abilities, represent the Manichean impulses of the avant-garde demiurge: the creator and the destroyer.

Groys extends his argument all the way to the mid-'80s in order to com-

plete the historical framework of Stalinist culture. The original half-mystic, half-rational avant-garde sought to compensate for the death of God by positing the Artist-Creator as savior; and Socialist Realism took up the baton and substituted the Leader as chief artist. Both sought to banish historical time by imposing their own aesthetic and political will. After Stalin's death, Groys says, Soviet artists tried to rejoin world history, but the chain of tradition had been broken. For the most part, they only succeeded in repeating the conceptual gestures of their predecessors: by creating self-referential mini-worlds. Reviving the larger social ambitions of the Russian avant-garde was not an option because of the extreme distaste that Soviet artists had acquired for any thing remotely smacking of politics.

The only way out of this dead end was discovered by the circle of unofficial Moscow artists and writers whom Groys discusses in the chapter titled "Postutopian Art." This section is an excellent summary of the most important movement in postwar Russian art; Groys is best when analyzing the specific works of contemporary art from which many of his arguments are drawn. Simply stated, these artists—who were outsiders to the official Soviet art bureaucracy—understood that the artist cannot escape complicity with ideology. Their strategy was not to assert counterclaims, but to parody and to unveil to mimic blasphemously the tropes of Stalinist culture.

Their originality, and their courage, if you will, lay in the fact that they did not

refuse to recognize the identity of artistic intent and the will to power at the source of their art. On the contrary, they [made] this identity the central object of artistic reflection, demonstrating hidden kinship where one would like to see only morally comforting contrast.

They even acknowledged their own nostalgia for the equation of art and power. Thus, Komar and Melamid signed their own names to standard Soviet slogan such as "COMMUNISM IS OUR GOAL," and proclaimed themselves the most famous artists of the end of the twentieth century, painting a double self-portrait in imitation of Lenin and Stalin. In paintings and installations of objects and text Ilya Kabakov proliferated narratives of little men with great utopian vision trapped in dreary communal apartments. And in several viciously funny series of poems, including "The Image of Reagan in Soviet Literature" and "The Apotheosis of the Militiaman," Dmitry Prigov catalogued the truisms of

an insulted and injured *homo sovieticus*. The bits of Soviet slogans stenciled over Erik Bulatov's photorealist canvases depicted a world in which people and even the beauties of the natural landscape could only be seen through the lens of ideology.

These artists skewed that lens to reveal the gap between Soviet rhetoric and reality—or rather, the way in which the rhetoric had become reality for every Soviet person, themselves included. Collectively, they portrayed a society plunged into the abyss of absurdity. They didn't propose, however, any substitute utopias. Their only agenda was clear vision. This conceptual Soviet Pop—known as “Sots Art”—owed as much to the dark, anarchistic streak running through Dadaism as to the more frivolous gibes of American Pop art. These were avant-garde artists who recognized the double-edged nature of their own (and the historical avant-garde) enterprise.

Some of Groys's first articles on Moscow Conceptualism, as the movement has come to be called, appeared in the early '80s in *A-Ya*, a bilingual journal of Russian non-conformist art that was published in Europe by the émigré sculptor Igor Chelkovski and smuggled back into Russia. (I became acquainted with his writing when I translated one of his early articles for *A-Ya*). He now teaches philosophy at the University of Münster in Germany, and the current book was published in German, pointedly called *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin*, in 1988.

The early avant-garde's role in politicizing Soviet art, and its collusion with Socialist Realism, was taken for granted in the circle of unofficial Moscow artists whom Groys discusses. Schooled by the changing rhetoric of Socialist Realist theory and the practical realities of Soviet life, they were anything but naïve about the relations of art and power, and they were attuned to the subtlest fluctuations of ideology. Other Moscow critics, writing during the late '70s and '80s in *A-Ya* and elsewhere, including Igor Golomstock and particularly Vladimir Paperny, also explored the mechanisms and paradigms of Socialist Realism and noted their continuity with certain avant-garde positions. (Golomstock's book, *Totalitarian Art*, which compares Fascist and Socialist Realist art, was published in English in 1990; Paperny's *Kultura dva*, or “Culture Two,” an important and fascinating study of Socialist Realist culture through its architecture, will be published in English by Cambridge University Press.)

For all the conviction that Groys dis-

plays (assisted by Charles Rougle's able translation of a turgidly written text), his rhetorical leaps will often leave the reader dizzy and grasping for an empirical foothold. Groys explains in the introduction that he feels a detailed factual chronology might “lose the inherent logic connecting [cultural phenomena],” but his arguments suffer from the lack of historical examples and linear exposition. Just as Socialist Realism collapsed all of history into one dominant narrative that served its purpose, Groys tends to collapse many avant-garde artists into one monolithic demiurge. He offers only a few quotes from manifestos to buttress and to illuminate a very ambitious argument. Specifics don't have to undermine generalities. Precisely which artists comprise “the avant-garde” that Groys speaks of? Did their positions change in the course of the '20s? What were the mechanisms by which myths were transformed into reality, to coin a Soviet slogan?

The most problematic issue is the constant conflation of aesthetic and political gestures. For Groys, this is precisely the point: the artistic metaphors of the avant-garde were not at all metaphorical under the historical circumstances of the October Revolution. And the point is well taken. The art world's power politics of the '20s and '30s were nasty, and not enough is known about them in the West. Still, without an historical chronology the reader has no way of judging. The avant-garde is held morally responsible for Socialist Realism and, by extension, for the Stalinist state. The Stalinist state in turn is presented as a work of art and the Revolution as an aesthetic enterprise.

This is very neat on paper, and Groys is often persuasive. But one fears that the metaphorical and the real have been pushed beyond the limits of their interchangeability. Since the difference between the two spheres can be measured by the death count, it is important to be specific, to draw distinctions, to discern where and when the line between them was crossed or disappeared—in fact, to point to the very existence of a line, even if its location shifts and must be constantly sought anew. Despite the undeniable correlation between a great deal of avant-garde rhetoric and the repressive practices of the Bolshevik regime, one ends up wondering whether Groys does not attribute far too much actual power to the artist: his claims often recall the type of brashly narcissistic declaration for which Russian avant-garde artists were famous.

And yet, the value of this book

extends far beyond its immediate historical subject. The reaction to Groys's position reveals much about the political stakes involved in contemporary art historical debate. I doubt that Groys's explications of Socialist Realist paradigms or the Stalin cult will generate much controversy; few Western art historians know enough about Socialist Realism to adequately argue a point. But the view that “we must reflect both upon the supposed absolute innocence of the avant-garde that fell victim to [Socialist Realist] culture and upon the irreproachability of the modernist artistic intention as such” hits a live political nerve. Socialist Realism has taught Russians to see modernism (and post-modernism) as yet another myth, rather than the sacred cow it still is here. American proponents of an apolitical, primarily aesthetic interpretation of the avant-garde find the whole issue of its politics irritating, and wish that it would go away. Politically engaged (i.e., Marxist-oriented) critics find Groys's position pernicious, because it threatens their view of the avant-garde as a progressive, democratizing force, and their remaining fantasies about the Russian Revolution.

The avant-garde still looks like redemption to many Western art historians, perhaps more than ever now that there is no Soviet Union. In the lead essay for the Guggenheim's Russian avant-garde exhibition, “The Great Utopia,” held in 1992, the British art historian Paul Wood argued against Groys, insisting that “the main issue ... is whether the ends of the October Revolution can be said to be the same as the ends of the Stalinist system of the thirties and after ... for Groys, they are.” For Wood (whose essay attempts to correlate avant-garde positions with left-wing opposition to the party in the '20s), and for a great many other contemporary Western art historians who have their own political axe to grind, they are not. Wood patronizingly discounts Groys's book as one of the “recently emergent, conservatively inflected histories which play upon a claimed complicity with Stalinism as a part of a wider project of burying affirmations of social revolution, the collective, and planning.” The complicity was far more than that; but the issue is how it manifested itself and the lessons that we draw from it. Sixty years after the avant-garde's demise, the battles of October are still being fought through art, but now by proxy, in the halls of Western academe.

JAMEY GAMBRELL is a contributing editor of *Art in America*.

NEW YORK DIARIST

Storytelling

YOUR LEGAL CORRESPONDENT has been doing his part to keep this magazine 100 percent O.J.-free. My resolution to miss each moment of the trial of the century began out of indolence and has now blossomed into a ripe affectation. The truth is that I've always had an aversion to celebrity trials: the soap operatic narratives spun out to arouse the passions of jurors leave me alternately indifferent and uncomfortable; and the messy particularity of actual human experience tends to obscure the abstract legal principles that make my heart race. To provide academic cover for my elaborate shirking, I went to New Haven last weekend for a conference on "Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law." The device of "storytelling" is becoming increasingly popular in legal scholarship, as a way for previously excluded voices to challenge (skeptics say to avoid) the rigors of traditional legal analysis with parables and personal anecdotes. The purpose of the conference was to assess what, exactly, the storytelling movement has accomplished.

THERE WERE MEMORABLE PERFORMANCES by Catharine MacKinnon, Janet Malcolm and Alan Dershowitz, just off the plane from Los Angeles. MacKinnon excoriated Malcolm for raising lying to a form of art in her articles about Jeffrey Masson, who is also MacKinnon's husband. She then attacked Daniel Farber of the University of Minnesota for suggesting that she saw pornography as a kind of storytelling that bypasses the conscious mind, although her latest book, *Only Words*, does indeed suggest that the message of pornography "is addressed directly to the penis." Dershowitz followed an elegant disquisition by Peter Brooks on Rousseau's confession that he framed his chambermaid for stealing a ribbon, and began with a confession of his own. "When we infuse storytelling into our own legal process, we confuse fiction with fact," he intoned. "All stories are advocacy." In Los Angeles, Dershowitz announced, the prosecution is trying to spin a theatrical narrative about how wife-beating in Act I leads inevitably to murder in Act II; but he, Dershowitz, would prove that in real life, only one-tenth of 1 percent of spousal abuse cases

end in death. "Let the fact-finder beware," Dershowitz thundered, "that life is not a story." He was quickly deflated by Elaine Scarry of Harvard, who asked whether the relevant statistic wasn't, in fact, what percentage of men who murder their wives turn out previously to have abused their wives. "It's always relevant to look at the husbands," Dershowitz conceded. Nobody asked what he thought of Simpson's far less heuristic attempt at storytelling, *I Want to Tell You*, or what proportion of murder suspects in L.A. are meticulously framed by racist state conspiracies, corrupting scores of public officials in their wake.

HAVING ABANDONED scholarship to become a full-time self-advocate, Dershowitz can hardly be blamed for telling fantastic stories at exorbitant rates. But the narratology movement among real legal scholars has to be held to a higher standard of detachment and objectivity. Other panelists tended to confirm Dershowitz's confession that storytelling often degenerates into one-sided advocacy. Martha Minnow of Harvard, for example, told a moving story about the Jewish Diaspora, in order to create sympathy for the Satmar Hassidim, whose gerrymandered school district was struck down in the *Kiryas Joel* case last year. But Minnow chose not to tell the story (or examine the facts) of how the village is administered, in practice, as a municipal theocracy; and these facts are surely more relevant to the constitutional question. "When a story is well told, I part with my analytic abilities," concluded one panelist, which illustrates the danger of exalting empathy over law.

FROM NEW HAVEN, I TOOK THE train to New York to see *The Merchant of Venice*, which illustrates the need to temper law with the spirit of empathy. The director was my friend Barry Edelstein who, at the age of 29, was making his New York debut at the Public Theater. It was painful, therefore, to pick up *The New York Times* last week and read Vincent Canby's unusually vicious review. ("Like a first year reading in a drama school... no coherent vision.... There's no excuse for this *Merchant*.") Some of Canby's invective seemed banal: he began by comparing Shylock's desire for revenge to "Rambo's on the Vietcong," and he complained that the play "is supposed to be a romantic comedy," a nineteenth-century conceit that directors in the post-Holocaust era have mercifully abandoned. Furthermore, Canby's own debut

as chief drama critic has been rocky: a *Times* fact-checker confided to *New York Magazine* recently that Canby, in several of his maiden reviews, insisted on referring to "Frank Lloyd Weber." Still, the genial Canby seems more inclined to burble than to pan, and so I arrived in New York with a littlerepidation.

MAYBE I'M TOO BIASED TO BE RELIABLE, but I thought the boldly unsentimental production brimmed with ideas. The radiant Laila Robins as Portia was the central character, a choice inadvertently highlighted by Ron Leibman's self-absorbed and introspective performance



as Shylock. Law and literature scholars have long searched for a dramatic motive for Portia in the trial scene. Disguised as Dr. Balthasar, the Dershowitz of the day, she arrives from Padua to offer expert testimony about whether Shylock is entitled to cut a pound of flesh from Antonio, who has defaulted on a bond. She knows from the start that it is a capital offense in Venice for Jews, as aliens, to conspire

against the lives of citizens; yet before informing Shylock that he must die for the crime of conspiracy, Portia first goes through the charade of appealing to his sense of mercy. The dramatic center of this production was Antonio's latent attraction to Bassanio; and when Portia discovered their love in the middle of the trial scene, she suddenly realized that her storybook marriage to Bassanio was a fraud. Then, when Shylock observed "These be the Christian husbands!" Portia turned on him maniacally, projecting her jealous rage onto the Jew—"Thou shalt have justice more than thou desire'st"—and converting herself from mediator into vindictive prosecutor.

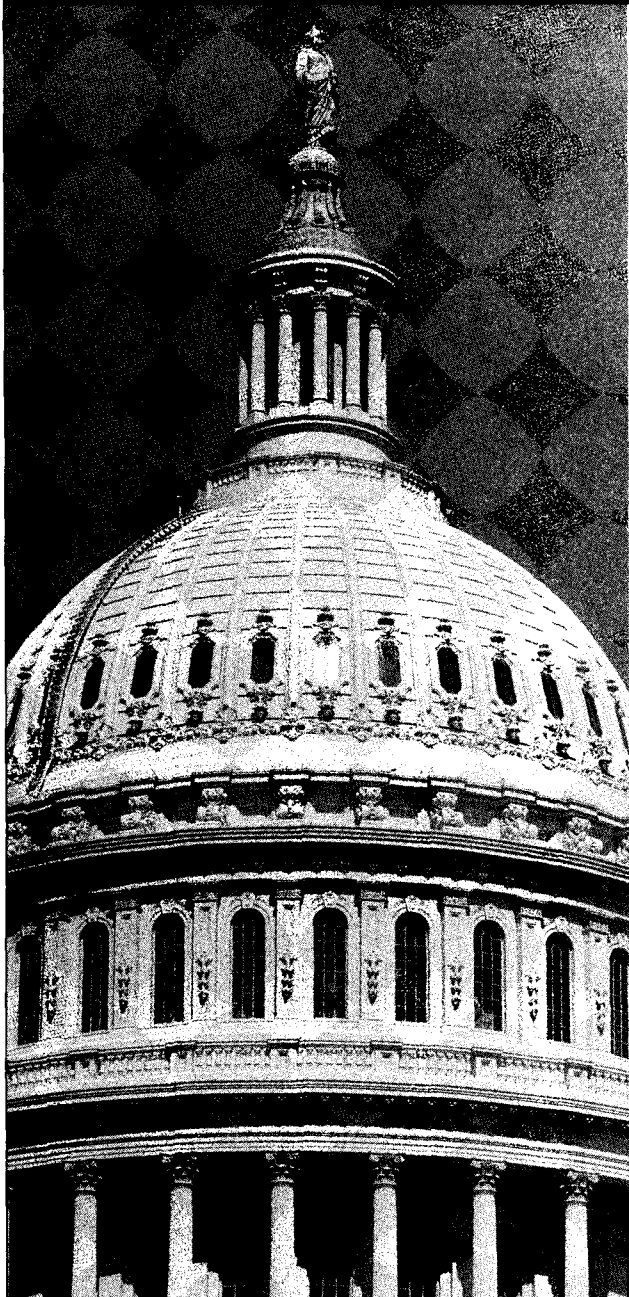
THE PERVERSE NARRATIVE AT THE Public Theater—justice corrupted by the sexual jealousy of a defense attorney turned prosecutor—was a daring challenge to the conventional reading of the play, which contrasts the Old Testament virtues of rule-bound, Borkian legal formalism with the Christian virtues of mercy, flexibility and equity. Imagine the chilling scene: a female prosecutor dressed in men's clothes, undone by a broken marriage, half-crazed by racist spite, determined to destroy a wealthy and powerful representative of a despised minority group. What a monstrous story. Thank goodness that, outside the theater, such a tale could never be told.

JEFFREY ROSEI

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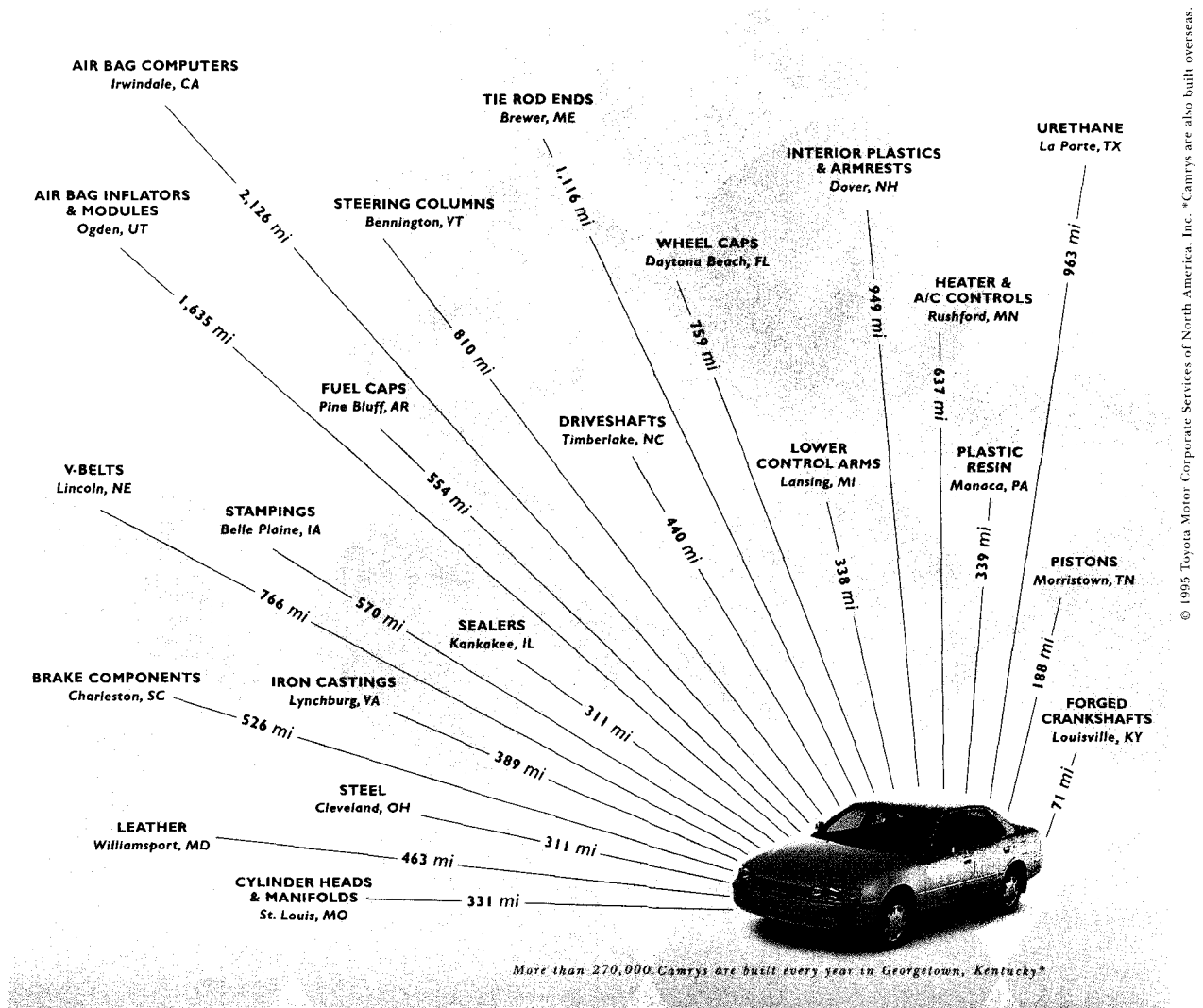
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